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Morocco supports Iraqi peace offer

RABAT (R) — Morocco, which has troops ranged against Iraq in the Gulf, Saturday became the first Arab member of the allied coalition to come out in support of Baghdad's conditional offer to withdraw from Kuwait. The official news agency MAP said King Hassan had told a meeting of the Moroccan cabinet that Friday's Iraqi peace offer was "a positive step along the path to a just peace in the region." He said a peaceful settlement "to be durable, must be based on the preservation of the Iraqi people's dignity, not their humiliation, and respect for their territorial integrity." King Hassan sent a token force of 1,300 infantrymen to Saudi Arabia a week after Iraq invaded Kuwait on Aug. 2. He has said the troops are purely defensive and will not attack Iraq.

Three U.S. jets lost in action

RIYADH (R) — Two U.S. "tank-buster" jets were lost and their pilots listed as missing in action as allied aircraft continued pounding Iraqi positions, a military spokesman said Saturday. Brigadier General Richard Neal said the two A-10 planes were attacking units of Iraq's elite Republican Guard in north-west Kuwait. It was not known how the jets were downed. Gen. Neal said an F-16 ground attack plane had crashed as it approached an airfield in Saudi Arabia and its pilot was killed. The accident was described as "non-combat related." The three aircraft losses brought to 29 number of allied coalition aircraft confirmed destroyed since the Gulf war started on Jan. 17. Twenty of the losses were American. Gen. Neal said 2,600 sorties had been flown in the past 24 hours, most of them against Republican Guard and other Iraqi positions throughout Kuwait.

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Allies answer Iraq's peace offer with bombs

130 civilians killed in British attack on Fallouja buildings

Combined agency dispatches

ALLIED BOMBS JOLTED Baghdad Saturday and shattered hopes for peace as a new civilian tragedy was uncovered in western Iraq where British warplanes reportedly demolished an apartment building and a market, killing 130 people.

Reporters were escorted by Information Ministry officials to the town of Fallouja, 65 kilometres west of Baghdad, to inspect the scene of the British air raid Thursday.

The British Tornado jet fighters were apparently aiming for two strategic bridges over the Euphrates River. They demolished one, but missed the second, hitting the nearby multi-storey building and the market.

Civil defence officials in the town, off the Baghdad-Amman highway, said all 130 victims were civilians, mainly tenants who were buried in the wreckage of their homes. Seventy-eight others were wounded and hospitalised, and these were mainly shoppers and vendors.

Iraqi officials in the town said one of the Tornado aircraft was shot down, and crashed in Bakawija, 20 kilometres west of Fallouja.

British military officials had reported a Tornado shot down in operations over Iraq Thursday and said its two-member crew was missing.

The Iraqi officials refused to say what happened to the pilot and the navigator.

In London, a spokesman for the Ministry of Defence said Saturday that the royal air force had been attacking bridges in the area of Fallouja.

"We do not yet know whether we were attacking the particular bridge in Fallouja at the time claimed, and we have no direct evidence we were operating in the area at the time," said the spokesman.

The Iraqi military command reported that 21 additional bodies have been recovered from the wreckage of the bombed shelter in Baghdad, and said rescue operations had ended.

Previous figures released by the armed forces general command reported 293 corpses retrieved. With the new ones, the death toll stood at 314.

It was not clear if the search was stopped because all the bodies had been retrieved or because the civil defence had lost hope of finding more.

Officials had estimated that 500 people perished in the attack on

the reinforced concrete structure in the Al Amerieh neighbourhood.

The communique by the armed forces general command reported 95 air raid attacks on civilian targets across Iraq and 120 others on military installations overnight. It gave no details.

But Baghdad residents said the attacks on the capital began a few hours after the ruling Revolutionary Command Council's announcement Friday that Iraq was willing to withdraw from Kuwait if certain conditions were met.

Allied warplanes hit the outskirts of the capital Friday evening and returned for three more bombing sorties on the heart of Baghdad at dawn Saturday.

Officials would not say what targets were hit in the city or elsewhere in Iraq.

Anti-aircraft gunners unleashed deafening barrages against the raiding planes, but loud explosions of missiles and bombs dropped from the air continued to shake the city.

The air strikes quelled the jubilation that spread across Baghdad Friday after the Revolutionary Command Council declared Iraq had "decided to accept U.N.

(Continued on page 5)

Iraq fires 2 missiles at Israel

IRAQ FIRED two missiles at Israel Saturday but there were no immediate reports of casualties, chief army spokesman Nachman Shai said.

Air raid sirens warning of a Scud attack sounded at 8.15 p.m. (1815 GMT) and the army told all Israelis to don gas masks and take shelter in sealed rooms against a possible poison gas attack.

The army said the missiles landed in uninhabited areas.

Gen. Shai said the army had no initial reports of casualties and the missiles carried conventional warheads as did all previous ones fired at Israel.

About forty minutes after the attack, Gen. Shai gave an all-clear signal to the entire country. People were told they could take off gas masks and leave sealed rooms.

The last area to be released was the southern region of the country including the Negev desert, the Red Sea resort Eilat and parts of the occupied West Bank.

In past attacks, the central region of the country, where most of the missiles have fallen, was the last to be released.

It was the 14th Iraqi Scud missile attack on Israel since the

(Continued on page 5)

King hails Iraqi peace initiative, hopes for positive response from all

Jordan launches diplomatic efforts in follow-up to Iraqi move

By a Jordan Times Staff Reporter
with agency despatches

HIS MAJESTY King Hussein has welcomed the Iraqi peace initiative to end the war in the Gulf and voiced support for Iraq's decision to accept Security Council Resolution 660 to achieve that end.

In a cable to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, the King expressed hope that "all concerned parties will seize the opportunity to achieve peace after realising Iraq's genuine keenness on upholding the international legi-

timacy and Security Council resolutions," the Jordan News Agency, Petra, said.

Following is the text of the King's cable to President Saddam:

"We received with delight and happiness your responsible initiative for peace which represented your true commitment to the higher Arab national interests and which clearly expressed your concern to safeguard peace, security and international legitimacy. The initiative clearly manifests the true and unique character of your statesmanship. Your pledge to deal with

Security Council Resolution 660, which calls for Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, underlines the same position you had adopted and which I personally learnt from you in the first 48 hours of the Gulf crisis.

"It was then that we had conveyed this pledge to all the concerned parties with the hope that the crisis would be contained within the Arab framework to which Resolution 660 had clearly referred. But the opportunity was missed. Your responsible stand was not permitted to take its course towards implementation; hence the subsequent escalation

in the crisis which climaxed in the ongoing devastating war.

"Your latest initiative represents a reiteration and a confirmation of your first position with regard to the Gulf crisis. Now, as we send you our greetings and appreciation for restating that initiative with clarity and commitment, we hope that it will be given a better chance than your earlier initiative in the first and second days of the Gulf crisis.

"We seize this occasion to reaffirm to you dear brother that

(Continued on page 5)

Cheney: No let-up in war

Combined agency dispatches

U.S. DEFENCE SECRETARY Dick Cheney Saturday welcomed a new burst of Soviet diplomacy aimed at ending the Gulf war although he all but ruled out a ceasefire ahead of an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait.

"If they (the Soviet Union) can persuade (Iraq) to comply with the U.N. resolutions and get out of Kuwait, by reiterating once again that that's the only acceptable outcome, that obviously would be a service," he said.

"But I don't think there's any room here for any pause, any ceasefire — anything other than complete, total, unconditional compliance with the U.N. Resolutions," he said.

Mr. Cheney made his comments on the CNN television programme "Newsweek Saturday."

He said it was important for the allies to continue military operations despite Iraq's offer to quit Kuwait provided, among other conditions, its departure was linked to a "full and comprehensive ceasefire on land, air and sea."

"To grant Iraq a ceasefire could give Iraq time to reposition (its) equipment, resupply (its) forces, put (it) in a position where (it) could do serious damage and ultimately extract a higher cost in terms of lives than would otherwise be the case," Mr. Cheney concluded.

"So we really have no interest in a ceasefire," he added. "What we have an interest in is (Iraq's) complete withdrawal from Kuwait."

Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz was due in Moscow Sunday to hold talks on Monday with President Mikhail Gorbachev and Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh.

Mr. Cheney declined to be drawn on the timing for any ground offensive by U.S. and allied troops.

"At some point we may well want to start the next phase of the campaign, which would use our ground and our amphibious forces," he said. "But at present we believe we are making significant progress in the air and, well, we'll keep it up."

(Continued on page 3)

Anbari: Iraq ready for talks with any party active in conflict

Combined agency dispatches

IRAQ'S U.N. ambassador said Saturday his government wants to negotiate with the United States and all parties waging war against his country before Iraq withdraws from Kuwait.

Speaking about Iraq's offer Friday to withdraw from Kuwait, Ambassador Abdul Amir Al Anbari also said that what most nations call Iraq's conditions "are not conditions, but linkages," adding that some could be fulfilled instantly, while others would take months or longer.

Iraq's Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) said Friday it would accept Security Council Resolution 660 demanding Iraq's immediate, total and unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait. But the RCC sought to link it with an Israeli pullout from Arab territories.

Mr. Anbari spoke to reporters as he entered a closed-door meeting of the Security Council to discuss the Gulf war and Iraq's

withdrawal statement, which was officially presented to the U.N.

Asked if Baghdad was ready to negotiate with the government of the emir of Kuwait Mr. Anbari told reporters: "We are ready to negotiate and sit down with any party who is really active in the current conflict."

He pointed out that Resolution 660 called for immediate withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait and immediate negotiations.

Mr. Anbari implied Iraq should negotiate with the United States as the prime force behind the anti-Iraq coalition.

He condemned the swift rejection by President George Bush and members of a U.S.-led coalition of the Iraqi peace initiative.

"Over the past few weeks we have heard so many complaints that Iraq simply wouldn't utter the word 'withdrawal' or utter the word 'Kuwait'," Mr. Anbari said.

"Now when Iraq came with this important proposal, namely to implement Resolution 660, they

said our list is just a piece of propaganda. It shows that there are so many people in very high positions that can reject initiatives for peace even without reading the initiatives, without comprehending or understanding.

"It also shows that they are not interested in Resolution 660, because that resolution doesn't provide only for immediate withdrawal. It also provides for immediate negotiations."

When a reporter noted Resolution 660 called for negotiations between Iraq and Kuwait, which Baghdad has declared to be its 19th province, he replied: "I don't know what happened to the Kuwaiti side. They have disappeared in the Sheraton Hotel somewhere and only America really is in command now of the war."

Stressing that the United States was the real partner for any negotiations, he said: "I believe the United States is the leader of that

(Continued on page 5)

Kremlin hopes to build on Iraq's peace initiative

Combined agency dispatches

THE KREMLIN said Iraq's terms for withdrawal hinted that the Soviet Union would press for more acceptable conditions when Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz visits Moscow Sunday.

Foreign ministry spokesman Vitaly Churkin said Baghdad's Friday announcement setting conditions for a pullout was a "start toward peace."

Mr. Churkin remained committed to an unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait, as specified in U.N. Security Council resolutions.

"The chief thing, in our view, consists of the fact that the Iraqi leadership is speaking of withdrawal from Kuwait," Mr. Churkin said in a prepared statement.

"Unfortunately, this principled provision is linked to many conditions, which could render it meaningless."

Mr. Churkin said Moscow, originator of a recent burst of Gulf war diplomacy, considered the Baghdad statement, issued in the

China welcomes Iraqi proposal

CHINA SAID Saturday Iraq's offer to withdraw from Kuwait was a positive step and should be put into practice.

A Foreign Ministry statement, issued by the official new China News Agency, made no specific mention of the conditions Iraq put on the withdrawal.

"This is the first time Iraq has indicated a willingness to withdraw its troops from Kuwait which represents a positive step towards a political settlement of the Gulf conflict," the agency quoted a Foreign Ministry spokesman as saying.

"It is our hope that Iraq's indication of a troop withdrawal will be accompanied by specific measures and will be translated into practice," the spokesman said.

The spokesman repeated China's demand that all parties show maximum restraint and lower the intensity of hostilities "so as to help create conditions for the efforts of the international community to seek a peaceful settlement."

name of its Revolutionary Command Council, to be only a beginning.

"We hope the coming discussions in Moscow with the envoy of the Iraqi President, (Mr. Aziz) will make it possible to advance toward the goal which remains unchanged — the fulfilment of all U.N. Security Council resolu-

tions."

Mr. Aziz is due in Moscow late Sunday and has talks scheduled the following day with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh.

There were clear signs that

(Continued on page 5)

Hammadi, Velayati meet in Tehran

Combined agency dispatches

IRAQI DEPUTY Prime Minister Saadoun Hammadi conferred Saturday with Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati about Iraq's conditional offer to withdraw from Kuwait, the Iranian news agency reported.

Dr. Hammadi, a member of Iraq's ruling Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), met with Mr. Velayati at Tehran airport and flew to western Iran for a land journey home, the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) reported.

It said the two also discussed the Soviet Union's stance on the Gulf war.

Dr. Hammadi, a senior aide to President Saddam Hussein, was completing a tour of Arab countries to solicit support for Iraq, and arrived in Tehran from Yemen late Friday. It was his third visit to Tehran in three weeks.

Iranian officials and newspapers hailed Friday's announcement by the RCC as an opening for peace which the West should not let slip.

Iran's Ambassador to the United Nations Kamal Kharrazi told a closed session of the U.N. Security Council in New York that the offer "provides the ground for the Security Council to double its diplomatic efforts to encourage Iraq to comply" with its resolutions.

He said Iran was concerned about the long-term goals of the United States and its allies in the region.

Iran, which fought a war with Iraq from 1980 to 1988, has remained neutral in the latest conflict.

Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said earlier this month that he was ready to meet Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and to talk to the Americans in search of peace.

But he stressed that a complete Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait and the removal of foreign forces from the region should form the basis of any settlement.

Mr. Kharrazi said Mr. Rafsanjani would send a high-level delegation to Baghdad in the coming days with a detailed reply to the last message from President Saddam delivered in Tehran by Dr. Hammadi a week ago.

The ambassador said the United Nations machinery was being used as a "catalyst for implementation of foreign policy of certain permanent members of the council."

"Speaking quite frankly, we are concerned about the future of our region," he said. "We are concerned about the far-reaching objectives of the United States and its allies in the region."

He said Washington had yet to

(Continued on page 5)

Arafat urges Bush to study Iraqi proposal seriously

PLO leader says Iraq remains confident, losses much lesser than it expected

By P.V. Vivekanand
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat Saturday called on the United States and its allies to reconsider their rejection of the Iraqi peace initiative if only because any continuation of the war would bring in massive casualties of a catastrophic nature and involve the use of neo-conventional weapons.

At the same time, Mr. Arafat also warned that the Iraqi acceptance of U.N. Security Council Resolution 660 — which calls for Iraq to withdraw its forces from Kuwait — should not be taken as a sign of weakness on the part of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

Sounding an ominous warning that the next phase of the war — a ground assault by the American-led allied forces after relentless hammering casualties will be very high," Mr. Arafat told a press conference: "I am appealing to President Bush... that it is better for him... not to take this catastrophic war any further and to put an end to (it)."

Mr. Arafat, who arrived here from Baghdad earlier in the day, was received by His Majesty King Hussein. The two leaders discussed the latest situation in the Gulf war and moves aimed at bringing about a ceasefire, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, said. It was believed that the latest Iraqi initiative and the reaction it has drawn from the U.S. and its allies also figured high in the discussions. Mr. Arafat also briefed the King on the outcome of his talks with President Saddam.

President Bush described as a "cruel hoax" the Iraqi initiative because it linked Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait to the departure of the American-led multinational forces and Israel relinquishing the occupied Arab territories.

Mr. Arafat, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), argued that Mr. Bush had "no right to reject the Iraqi peace initiative. He has to study it seriously with his experts and assistants before rejecting it. I hope he will study it."

"I am appealing to President Bush not to become the hero of war and to be the hero of peace," he said. "We are not in need of

another Nero of Rome here." "Enough is enough," he said. "Stop this killing, stop this devastation, stop this catastrophe."

The Palestinian leader, who met with President Saddam over the weekend in Baghdad, said the Iraqi leadership, by announcing the intention to withdraw from Kuwait, had complied with one of the key elements that European and other countries demanded from Iraq during their efforts to avert the war which broke out on Jan. 17.

Withdrawal was the magic word that everyone said was missing," Mr. Arafat said. "The Iraqi initiative of Aug. 12 (which did not contain any explicit reference to withdrawal but linked all Middle East problems with the Gulf crisis) has been made clear now."

He specifically referred to French efforts and to a statement made by President Francois Mitterrand that an "Iraqi declaration of its intention to withdraw" would have been enough to avert war.

(Continued on page 5)

Key coalition partners throw cold water on peace hopes

THE RAY OF HOPE that Iraq's offer to withdraw from Kuwait could lead to a ceasefire in the south-old Gulf war faded to a glimmer Saturday, as key allied nations rejected the proposal.

The United States and Britain made clear the war would continue unless Iraq dropped its conditions for withdrawal from Kuwait. U.S. President George Bush rejected the Iraqi proposal as a "cruel hoax" while British Prime Minister John Major labelled it a "bogus sham."

Kuwaiti Crown Prince and Prime Minister Sheikh Saad Al Abdullah Al Sabah said in a statement that the Iraqi offer "adds nothing new."

In Saudi Arabia, where hundreds of thousands of allied troops are stationed against Iraqi forces, a government spokesman announced the kingdom's "categorical rejection of the Iraqi communique in sum and total," according to the Saudi Press Agency.

The official said the Iraqis failed to display "a serious, honest desire" to implement the U.N. resolutions that demand they withdraw from Kuwait unconditionally.

In Cairo eight Arab states aligned in the U.S.-led anti-Iraq coalition agreed Saturday on a

formula for their security and economic well-being after the Gulf war. It reportedly involves Egyptian-Syrian military moves financed by Gulf petrodollars.

The accord was reached at a two-day conference of foreign ministers from Egypt, Syria and members of the Gulf Cooperation Council — Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman.

A senior delegate said the conference drew up a framework agreement for submission to heads of state for approval.

The delegate said the agreement's basis is trading Egyptian and Syrian military might for substantial development aid from the oil-rich members of the Gulf council.

A statement released at the end of the conference referred in general terms to the security-for-aid discussions. It said the foreign ministers would meet again in Damascus on March 5.

A joint communique read to reporters by GCC Secretary-General Abdullah Bishara ignored Friday's conditional offer by Baghdad to pull out of Kuwait. It said terms for an end to the war were:

1. Iraq's unconditional and complete withdrawal from the territories of Kuwait.

2. The return of "legitimacy" in Kuwait.

3. Full implementation of related U.N. Security Council resolutions.

4. A commitment to the principles of settling conflicts between nations by peaceful means.

Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq Al Shara told reporters the statement by Iraq's ruling Revolutionary Command Council did not even mention Kuwait by name.

A string of conditions attached to withdrawal showed "a lack of sufficient seriousness by the Iraqi leadership," he said.

Most of the other allies in the American-led anti-Iraq coalition, including France, Germany, Italy and other European states, have rejected the Iraqi peace initiative.

Spanish Foreign Minister Francisco Fernandez Ordenez said Iraq's conditions for a withdrawal from Kuwait were unacceptable, but there was still hope for Gulf peace.

"The Iraqi proposal is to study the possibility of a withdrawal linked to many demands that for the moment are not acceptable," he told Algerian radio after arriving in Algiers.

But we maintain the hope that

(Continued on page 5)

Riyadh residents, or whoever is left, live in perpetual fear

By P.V. Vivekanand
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The government of Saudi Arabia appears to have temporarily shifted itself to Jeddah, and the royal family to Mecca and Medina and on the western side of the Kingdom beyond the range of Iraqi missiles, and very few Saudi nationals remain in the capital, Riyadh according to expatriates and family members arriving here across the border.

"At least three missiles have hit parts of Riyadh and one of them totally demolished the Saudi passport department building," said one. "The entire population of Riyadh, or whoever is left of it, is living in perpetual fear," he told the Jordan Times.

Another missile hit a military airport on the outskirts of the capital in the second week of the war which started Jan. 17 and caused "at least 100 injuries," he said, insisting on anonymity.

Several others who also preferred anonymity confirmed this account and added that Riyadh was totally under the

control of American soldiers. "All services in the city have been taken over by Egyptian workers, and many Jordanians and Palestinians have been taken off sensitive jobs in the electricity and water sector," said another source.

According to the sources, over 50 per cent of the present population in Riyadh are Jordanians and Palestinians, and a few hundred Westerners in addition to Asian expatriates and Egyptians.

"Several hundred thousands of Saudi nationals have either moved to Jeddah, Mecca and Medina or to Egypt," said one source. "Asian and Arab expatriates who want to leave are told that they would not be allowed back and no compensation or gratuity will be paid," he said.

Although several of the sources said there were dozens of deaths from the missile attacks, none of them reported seeing dead bodies. Official Saudi reports have spoken of hits in the capital by debris of missiles intercepted by American Patriot missiles and less than 50 injuries in all (all re-

ports on the war originating from Saudi Arabia are heavily censored, and there has been no independent account of the actual situation).

"All telephone calls are monitored and the moment one starts to speak of the security situation in Riyadh the line is cut off," said one expatriate. "I know of at least three occasions where two Jordanians and one Indian were picked up immediately after they spoke on the phone with relatives about the situation," he said. "They were deported."

"Mistrust and suspicion characterise Saudi officials' dealings" with Jordanians, Palestinians, Yemenis and Sudanese, according to the expatriate. "Bot on the level of the common man, the treatment is different; there seems to be more awareness and understanding of the situation on the part of the average Saudi national."

Saudi security forces "discourage" people from listening to Radio Jordan and describe the Jordanian media as "hostile enemy media," he said.

"But most people, including Saudis themselves, listen to Radio Jordan from closed rooms," he added.

One of the "good tidings" that the war has brought about in Riyadh, according to the expatriate is the "virtual disappearance" of mutawa (religious policemen who enforce strict adherence to Islamic code of conduct).

"Even Saudis themselves are happy that mutawa are no longer visible," he said.

The Saudi national carrier, Saudia, is the only airline flying to Riyadh and those who want to leave have to fly to Jeddah aboard Saudi planes for onward flights, aviation sources have said.

Prices of foodstuffs have gone up in Riyadh as well as in Dammam, the so-called oil capital of Saudi Arabia, according to the expatriates.

"Stores are well stocked and there is no shortage of anything, but prices have gone up because there is a run on foreign currency at the banks," he told the Jordan Times.

Most residents are stocking drinking water and prices of

imported mineral water skyrocketed in the wake of the huge oil spill in the Gulf which threatens desalination plants — the water lifeline for the Saudis — he said.

"There are efforts to project an image of business as usual in Riyadh, but there cannot be any hiding of the fact that very little government business is done these days," said an expatriate who returned to Amman Friday. "Almost all ministers and senior officials are operating out of Jeddah, and most royal family members are staying in Mecca and Medina."

Many Saudi families are very upset by reports that the Arab forces, including Saudi soldiers, in the coalition would form the first line in a ground assault against Iraq, he said.

"They are asking: 'Why have we paid so much of money to the Americans if our own soldiers would be the first to be killed in a ground battle?'" he added. "They also question what happened to the American promise earlier that the crisis was no longer a Saudi problem but an American

problem which Americans would resolve with no damage to Saudi Arabia and its people?"

Diplomatic life has also come to almost a standstill in Riyadh since "many embassies are down to skeleton staff," he said. "Visitors to the missions are rigorously questioned by Saudi security forces."

The only bomb shelter in Riyadh is at the Hyatt Regency Hotel but this has been used exclusively for foreign journalists, according to a Jordanian girl who arrived Saturday. "The standing instruction to everyone is not to go outside whenever the air raid siren goes on."

"The Saudis are fed up with the situation. Many Saudis believe that the war would continue for some time but are happy with the belief that the Iraqis would eventually be defeated," she said.

"But there are also many who curse the Kuwaitis for bringing disaster to the region by turning a deaf ear to Iraqi calls (prior to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August)," she said.

Ground war looms despite Iraqi withdrawal offer

By Jim Wolf
Reuters

WASHINGTON — Iraq's conditional offer to quit Kuwait may be boomeranging against Baghdad by speeding allied preparations for the expected ground phase of the war.

Several Western military analysts contended Baghdad's offer could be a ploy to delay a land offensive, widely believed to be imminent, until Iraq can regroup and resupply its troops in Kuwait.

If Iraq were trying merely to buy time, its offer could backfire by confirming suspicions that it was counting on and erosion of the 28-nation, anti-Iraq coalition, analysts said.

They cited the offer's possible disruptive impact on the multinational coalition, given the different perspectives and domestic constituencies of coalition members.

Coalition forces seemed to be nearing the best time for attacking Iraqi forces which also suggests an early ground attack.

Allied commanders said on Friday they were close to a key objective, destruction of 50 per cent of Iraq's front-line armour. That would pave the way for allied battle plans emphasising speed, manoeuvring ability and high-technology weapons.

Other factors are the approach of the Saudi summer in March, with its scorching heat and blinding sand storms that may interfere with high-technology weapons, and the importance of ending the conflict by the time Muslim pilgrims journey to Mecca in June.

Western diplomats have said

that the Haj would be difficult for Saudi Arabia to manage if the war were continuing.

Iraq's ruling Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) said for the first time on Friday it was ready to negotiate a withdrawal from Kuwait in line with a U.N. Security Council resolution, but linked this to "a full and comprehensive ceasefire on land, air and sea."

Baghdad also tied a withdrawal to the scrapping of 11 other Security Council resolutions against Baghdad — including economic sanctions — and Iraq's withdrawal from occupied territories.

Allied officials have not said when they might launch a ground offensive, but the commander of British forces in the Gulf, Lieutenant-General Peter de la Billiere, said on Thursday that dates had been proposed. He declined to elaborate.

Emphasising steady progress in the air war, U.S. Marine Brigadier-General Richard Neal said in Riyadh Thursday that coalition bombing had destroyed 1,300 of 4,280 Iraqi battle tanks, 800 of 2,870 armoured vehicles and 1,100 of 3,110 artillery pieces in and around Kuwait.

Gen. Neal, briefing reporters on Friday shortly after President George Bush brushed off the Iraqi offer as a "cruel hoax," said the focus of the military effort remained "battlefield preparation" and destruction of the elite Republican Guard, the core of Iraq's military power.

Richard Perle, a former U.S. assistant secretary of defence, said the worst thing the coalition could do was play "Saddam game" and "that would run the

risk of destabilising the coalition."

Retired U.S. army colonel Harry Summers, a military strategist, equated Iraq's move with the "fight-talk-talk" tactics used by North Vietnamese leaders during the U.S. war in Indochina that ended with a communist victory in 1975.

"Every time the North Vietnamese got on the ropes, they came in for a ceasefire," he said, "and we grasped at straws in interminable times, stopping the war while they re-armed and re-equipped and then went at it again."

In spurning the offer as full of unacceptable conditions, Mr. Bush said the U.S.-led bombing campaign that began on Jan. 17 would continue unabated.

"Until a massive withdrawal begins, with those Iraqi troops visibly leaving Kuwait, the coalition forces... will continue their efforts to force compliance with all the resolutions of the United Nations," he said.

On the political front, Iraq's gambit could advance the next phase of the war for fear it might otherwise stir further anti-Western sentiment in the Arab and Islamic world.

The triumph of pro-Iraqi forces — or the defection of Morocco or Pakistan from the coalition — would spark new instabilities during and after the war.

"Every day of resistance by Iraq, a middling Arab state, against the full weight of the U.S. and its allies fuels anti-Western sentiment," Francois Heisbourg, director of the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London wrote in the International Herald Tribune Friday.

Falashas flow to Israel

TEL AVIV (R) — The Gulf war has scared thousands of would-be Soviet Jews from emigrating to Israel but prompted the biggest influx of Ethiopian Jews in years.

About 1,000 black Jews moved to the Jewish state in January and another 2,000 are expected this month, Ethiopian community leaders said Saturday. Only 3,500 arrived in all of 1990.

They said Ethiopian President Haile Mengistu Mariam was again allowing the Jews to leave after a months-long hiatus in a bid for Israel and U.S. aid to help him fight advancing rebels and save his war-strapped economy.

"Mengistu is opening the doors. He has an interest. He thinks Israel will persuade the Americans to help him if he lets the Jews go," said an Ethiopian community leader in Israel who asked not to be identified.

He told Reuters that Mr. Mengistu was achieving his political goals without risking an Arab backlash over the explosive issue of Jewish emigration to Israel because of his neighbours' preoccupation with the Gulf war.

"The Arab World will not criticise him because it's too busy with the war... and he can get what he wants in return," he said.

Foreign press reports have said Mr. Mengistu was seeking to harness his country's Jews for Israel weapons, and that U.S. and Israeli officials had visited Addis Ababa in November 1990 to negotiate the resumption of emigration.

While the flood of Soviet immigrants dropped by 60 per cent in January from the more than 35,000 who arrived in December, the Ethiopian newcomers say the Gulf conflict did not deter them and would not dissuade thousands more from emigrating.

"I would rather die in the holy land where I belong than stay in Ethiopia. My destiny is Israel's destiny," one said as he was issued a gas mask at the airport.

Widely known as Falashas, the Ethiopian Jews regard the term which translates as "the dispossessed" as derogatory.

"The black Jews are arriving in Israel since 1984," said Rahaim Elazar, secretary of Israel's Ethiopian organisation.

Mr. Elazar said 24,000 black Jews lived in Israel and another 15,000 awaited permission from Addis Ababa to emigrate.

Thousands of black Jews were separated from their families when premature publicity halted Operation Moses, a secret airlift that brought 12,000 Jews to Israel in late 1984 by way of Sudan.

UNHRC asks Israel not to settle emigres in Arab lands

GENEVA (AP) — The U.N. Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) Friday renewed its condemnation of Israel and said it was "gravely concerned" at the settlement of Soviet immigrants in the occupied territories.

Iraq joined nations such as Saudi Arabia, Cuba and India in sponsoring a resolution that called upon Israel to withdraw from Palestinian territory and stressing the "right of Palestinian people to resist the Israeli occupation by all means."

The 43-nation commission voted 26-1 to adopt a text that condemned "Israel's policies of ill-treatment and torture of Palestinian detainees and prisoners in Israeli prisons and concentration camps."

The United States cast the lone dissenting vote and 11 delegations abstained in protest at the term "concentration camp." These included Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Japan and West European members of the commission.

European delegations joined with the Soviet Union and developing countries in sponsoring a more strongly worded resolution calling on Israel to stop settling immigrants from the Soviet Union in the occupied territories.

The resolution, passed by 38-0

votes, described the practice as illegal. The United States abstained.

Israeli delegate Raphael Walden immediately denounced the resolution as "petty-minded and untruthful." He said the text was meant to "curry favour" with the Arab World and was "unworthy of some of the countries who put their names to it."

The resolution said the commission was "gravely concerned at the large-scale establishment of settlers, including immigrants, in the occupied territories by the Israeli government."

It said the policy was "liable to change the physical character and the demographic composition" of the occupied territories.

About 200,000 Soviet Jews settled in Israel last year and a further 13,000 arrived in January. The Israeli government has stressed it is not directing the immigrants to the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip and says less than one per cent of the immigrants have settled there.

However this figure does not include the Soviets who have moved to Arab Jerusalem. Western sources say more than 10,000 Soviets have settled in the occupied territories including Arab Jerusalem.

Israeli liberals blocked from taking food to Palestinians

AMARI CAMP, occupied West Bank (AP) — A convoy of Israelis on Friday brought sacks of food to Palestinians suffering from a month-long curfew, but soldiers banned them from distributing it.

The group from Clergy for Peace has already brought in a ton of supplies during the week and Friday's convoy was aimed at raising public awareness of the plight of the Palestinians.

The 6,000 residents of this crowded refugee camp, like the rest of 1.7 million Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, have been confined to their homes for much of the time since the start of the Gulf war.

Israel clamped the curfew to prevent violence by Palestinians, many of whom support Iraq for championing their cause. Most Palestinians have been unable to work because of the army strictures, and money is quickly running out.

Some 30 Arab and Jewish Israelis brought about 50 sacks of rice, flour, sugar and baby formula to Amari. Soldiers blocked them from distributing the food because of the curfew, but said

they could leave it to be handed out later.

"We took the food back because we were concerned it wouldn't reach the right hands," said Rabbi Jeremy Milorom, who organised the convoy.

"This food is a drop in the bucket, and won't last," Rabbi Milorom said. "But we hope it'll melt the icy hearts of those who are implementing this policy."

Even many left-wing Israelis have lost sympathy for Palestinians, some of whom cheered as Iraqi missiles were fired at Israel. The missiles have killed two people, wounded some 300 and damaged thousands of homes.

"The war has struck a cleavage between the two peoples. Israelis have withdrawn themselves and have become more involved and concerned over their own fears. I hope this is the thaw," Rabbi Milorom said adding he hopes to distribute the food next week.

"We want to break the framework of two peoples who are happy the other is suffering," said Yoel Skemtov, 26, a philosophy student at Hebrew University.

MIDDLE EAST NEWS IN BRIEF

Peace activists arrested in Britain

LONDON (R) — Twenty-nine peace campaigners protesting against the Gulf war were arrested Friday when they sat down in a road outside Britain's parliament, disrupting rush-hour traffic in central London. A police spokesman said the demonstration was peaceful and the 29 protesters did not try to resist arrest. He said some of those arrested could be charged with obstruction and some minor public order offences. A witness said a small group of demonstrators, some holding candles and singing "Give peace a chance," blocked traffic when they sat down in a busy road outside parliament. Among those arrested was Pat Arrowsmith, a veteran peace campaigner who was part of a now-disbanded peace camp set up on the Iraqi-Saudi border. "Some of us have just come back from Iraq where we saw civilian casualties and houses and schools which had been bombed," Mrs. Arrowsmith said before her arrest. "We are saying end this war now. Respond to any call for a ceasefire."

Two U.S. planes bring missiles to Turkey

ANKARA (R) — Two U.S. Galaxy transport aircraft have flown German anti-aircraft missile launchers to Turkey to defend the NATO ally against possible attack by neighbouring Iraq, a military source said Saturday. The source at southeastern Diyarbakir City said one of the planes landed at the city air base late Friday. The other arrived in Turkey earlier. A military spokesman in Ankara declined to say whether the transfer of about a dozen Roland and Hawk missiles pledged by Germany for Turkey's defence was complete. "We shall make an announcement after the deployment of the systems is completed," Colonel Hali Kalsayci told Reuters. The U.S. had to supply transport planes to ferry the missiles to Turkey after the crew of a chartered Soviet civil refused to fly into what they said was a war zone.

Smugglers seek drugs for Gulf troops

MOREH, India (R) — There is evidence that drug smugglers are seeking Burmese heroin to sell to American troops in the Gulf, a senior Indian customs official said. Ramesh Bhattacharji said in an interview with Reuters that two smugglers arrested near this Indo-Burmese border town recently confessed they planned to smuggle one kg of heroin to Dubai. He quoted the arrested men as saying the drugs would have been sold to Arab contacts offering higher than usual prices. Mr. Bhattacharji said that one informer had told him another smuggler was in Moreh offering four times the usual price for heroin made in Burma and usually smuggled to the West through India and Bangladesh. The informer quoted the smuggler as saying he would get high prices in the Gulf from Arabs intending to sell it to American soldiers. Mr. Bhattacharji said. Although much of the heroin manufactured in Burma was smuggled out through Thailand, India and Bangladesh were becoming increasingly popular routes, he said.

EC ready to relaunch aid to Lebanon

BRUSSELS (R) — The European Community (EC) is ready to resume aid to Lebanon suspended four years ago because of civil war, a European Commission spokesman said Friday. The EC has yet to pay out some 117 million European currency units (\$164 million) agreed before fighting in Lebanon made development cooperation impossible in 1986, he said. Fadi Chalal, president of Lebanon's Council for Reconstruction and Development, convinced EC Mediterranean Affairs Commissioner Abel Matutes Thursday that the conditions were right to resume cooperation, the spokesman said. Lebanon's government has brought relative stability to war-torn Beirut and is currently trying to extend its authority throughout the country, EC sources said. Aid pledged by the EC but not yet handed over includes 30 million euros (\$42 million) in grants and 87 million euros (\$122 million) in cheap loans. The money was destined for water supply and irrigation projects.

100 arrested in Egyptian town

CAIRO (R) — Police detained more than 100 Muslims militants Friday after they attacked shops in a central Egyptian town in protest at the arrest of their leader, security sources said. They said seven people were arrested on suspicion of setting fire to two pharmacies and a furniture store in the Nile-side town of Bent Suez, a stronghold of underground Islamic hardliners. Police later raided hideouts of members of the outlawed Jihad group, arrested at least 100 people and seized anti-government leaflets. The sources had no further details.

Sweden expels four Iraqi diplomats

STOCKHOLM (R) — Four Iraqi diplomats in Stockholm have been ordered to leave Sweden, accused of spying on refugees, the Swedish Foreign Ministry said Friday. "They have been engaged in activities which are incompatible with their diplomatic status and with Swedish law. They have therefore been declared persona non grata," ministry spokesman Lars-Olof Lundberg said. He declined to say whether the diplomats were alleged to have spied on fellow Iraqis, or whether the diplomats had already left Sweden. Iraq's embassy in Stockholm comprises a charge d'affaires and nine other diplomats. None of the Iraqi diplomats could be reached for comment on the expulsions.

Arlington receives first victim from Gulf

ARLINGTON, Virginia (AP) — Arlington national cemetery, the final resting place of servicemen from every American war, received its first victim from the Gulf war Friday. The cremated remains of Jonathan R. Edwards, a marine pilot killed in a helicopter crash, were buried in a section of the cemetery facing the Pentagon, headquarters of the U.S. Defence Department. His parents, wife and three children were at the funeral on a blustery, cold day. Captain Edwards, 36, had been in Saudi Arabia a month when his helicopter crashed Feb. 2 while supporting a medical evacuation mission near the Saudi-Kuwaiti border. His copilot, Marine Major Eugene McCarthy, also died.

Afghan floods kill 388 people

ISLAMABAD (R) — Devastating floods in southern Afghanistan have killed 388 people and 32,000 domestic animals, Kabul Radio said. Two weeks of torrential rain have created the worst flooding for decades, made thousands of people homeless and destroyed roads and bridges. The floods, which extend into neighbouring Pakistan and Iran, followed a powerful earthquake in northern Afghanistan on Feb. 1. The Kabul government said the quake might have killed 1,000 people but unusually heavy snow in the northern mountains make accurate estimates impossible.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

PRAYER TIMES

05:56 Fajr
06:14 (Sunrise) Doha
11:58 Dhuhr
14:57 'Asr
17:26 Maghrib
18:43 Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church Swedish Tel. 810740
Assistance of God Church, Tel. 632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590.
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 637440.
De la Salle Church Tel. 661757
Torrens Church Tel. 622666
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 622541.
Anglican Church Tel. 623383, Tel.

628543.
Assistance of God Church Tel. 632785.
St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590.
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 637440.
De la Salle Church Tel. 661757
Torrens Church Tel. 622666
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 622541.
Anglican Church Tel. 623383, Tel.

628543.
Assistance of God Church Tel. 632785.
St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590.
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 637440.
De la Salle Church Tel. 661757
Torrens Church Tel. 622666
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 622541.
Anglican Church Tel. 623383, Tel.

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology.
A cold front is approaching a depression centre south of Turkey is affecting the Kingdom. Therefore, temperatures will increase gradually and it will be cloudy and rainy.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

AMMAN: Dr. Walid Al Masi 675485
Dr. Rami Abu Zaid (-)
Dr. Khalid M'adadi 740500
Dr. Kayed Hayaya 793222
Pines pharmacy 661912

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN: Dr. Walid Al Masi 675485
Dr. Rami Abu Zaid (-)
Dr. Khalid M'adadi 740500
Dr. Kayed Hayaya 793222
Pines pharmacy 661912

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 631111
Civil Defence Department 661111
Civil Defence Immediate 774111

HOSPITALS

AMMAN: Hamam Medical Centre 813813/32
Khald Maternity, J. Am. 642816
Al-Hikmat Maternity, J. Am. 624412
Jabal Amman Maternity 642362
Malham, J. Amman 636140
Palestine, Shamsi 6641714
Shamsi Hospital 669131
Habashy Hospital 849045
Al-Mushtaq Hospital 6622279
The Islamic, Abdell 66212737

MARKET PRICES

Upper/lower price in the kg.
Apple 350 / 480
Banana 300 / 450

MARKET PRICES

Beans (Mankamar) 450 / 400
Beans 540 / 450
Cabbage 80 / 40
Carrot 180 / 120
Cauliflower 280 / 240
Cucumbers (large) 120 / 100
Cucumbers (small) 200 / 150
Dates 500 / 400
Eggplant 200 / 150
Garlic 1600 / 1400
Lentils 180 / 140
Marrow (large) 160 / 100
Marrow (small) 320 / 280
Onion (dry) 280 / 220
Onion (green) 150 / 100
Okra 600 / 500
Pepper (hot) 300 / 200
Pepper (sweet) 380 / 320
Potato 200 / 150
Radish 190 / 130
Sage 100 / 50
Spinach 400 / 300
Tomatoes 120 / 80
Tomatoes 170 / 120



Her Majesty Queen Noor Saturday receives President of the International Committee of the Red Cross Cornelio Sommaruga and the accompanying delegation (Petra photo).

Queen reviews humanitarian relief operations with ICRC president

HER MAJESTY Queen Noor Saturday received at Al-Ma'wa Palace the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva, Mr. Cornelio Sommaruga, who is currently on a visit to Jordan.

During the meeting Mr. Sommaruga briefed the Queen on the humanitarian activities of the ICRC in offering relief services to the civilian victims of the Gulf war, where he expressed his deep concern for the great number of casualties among civilians.

Mr. Sommaruga expressed solidarity with Jordan's position which has always been "... a sound of moderation and an advocate of peace." On the political level, Mr. Sommaruga expressed his support of His Majesty King Hussein's mediating role in trying to bring peace to the region, and Her Majesty's involvement with the evacuees, on the humanitarian level. He also lauded the Queen's efforts in trying to upgrade the living standards of individuals in Jordan, through income-generating schemes.

Queen Noor commended ICRC and said that "... your understanding and long history and involvement in humanitarian services are valuable, and we

hope that you continue your efforts in this respect," while expressing her concern over the long-term consequences of war.

The meeting was also attended by Mr. Khalil Othman, Ambassador at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Director of the Department of International Organizations and Conferences; Mr. Francois Bugnion, Mr. Sommaruga's legal advisor and Mr. Werner Kaspar, head of the ICRC delegation in Jordan.

Earlier Renter news agency reported that Sommaruga was paying the visit in the course of his efforts to seek ways to boost humanitarian efforts in the Gulf war.

In a statement to the agency, Sommaruga said he would meet with officials from the Jordan National Red Crescent Society (JNRCS) to see how to help all victims of the month-old war in Iraq, Kuwait and outside the two countries as well.

Sommaruga said that he would intervene with Iraq so that the ICRC could see allied prisoners of war held by Baghdad.

Iraq had said it would only allow the ICRC to visit prisoners of war when the U.S.-led Gulf allies stopped bombing civilian targets in Iraq.

"When the aggressors respect the Geneva conventions, we on our part will respect these conventions too," Iraq's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Mohammad Al Sahaf said last week.

ICRC has sent two consignments of medical supplies to Iraq from Iran.

On the situation in the Israeli-held Arab territories, Sommaruga said the ICRC had contacted Israel on its moves restricting Arab residents from returning to their homeland since the war began.

"We are in contact with the Israeli authorities in order that they would respect all provisions of the Fourth Geneva Conventions," said Sommaruga on his second trip to Jordan since the start of the Gulf crisis on Aug. 2.

Since the war began, Israel has virtually banned Palestinians from crossing into the West Bank and the Gaza Strip which had been under a blanket curfew.

More than 5,000 Palestinians, many of them penniless refugees from Kuwait, have been affected by the ban.

Jordan has complained to the ICRC and the United Nations accusing Israel of working to evict Palestinians.

Iran, Jordan deputies support Iraqi plan, back Palestinians

AMMAN (J.T.) — Jordan and Iran Saturday voiced support for Iraq's initiative for peace in the Gulf and reiterated their full support for the Palestinian people in their struggle to regain their usurped homeland.

A joint Jordanian-Iranian statement, issued here at the conclusion of an Iranian parliamentary team's visit to Jordan, said the Iraqi initiative came in response to numerous peace bids and was based in many aspects on Iranian initiatives which aimed at preserving the interests of the Arab and Islamic nations.

The statement said that the Jordanian and Iranian people stand firm by their Palestinian brothers in the face of Israel's

repressive measures that include detention, starvation, and eviction from their homes, and they condemn the ongoing process of Jewish immigration to Palestine.

The statement called for a halt to this Jewish immigration "so as to preserve the rights of the Muslim people of Palestine."

In the statement, the Jordanian side expressed appreciation of Iraq for its continued supply of food and medicine to the Iraqi people now facing an aggression, and said the Jordanian parliament joins the Iranian parliament in expressing regret over the negative stand of a number of Arab and Islamic countries with regard to the Gulf crisis and the allied aggression on Iraq.



Iranian and Jordanian deputies listen to Speaker Abdul Latif Arabiyat reading the joint statement.

The Jordanian side voiced appreciation to Iran for its expressed intention of coming to the aid of Jordan in the face of Israel's expansionist designs.

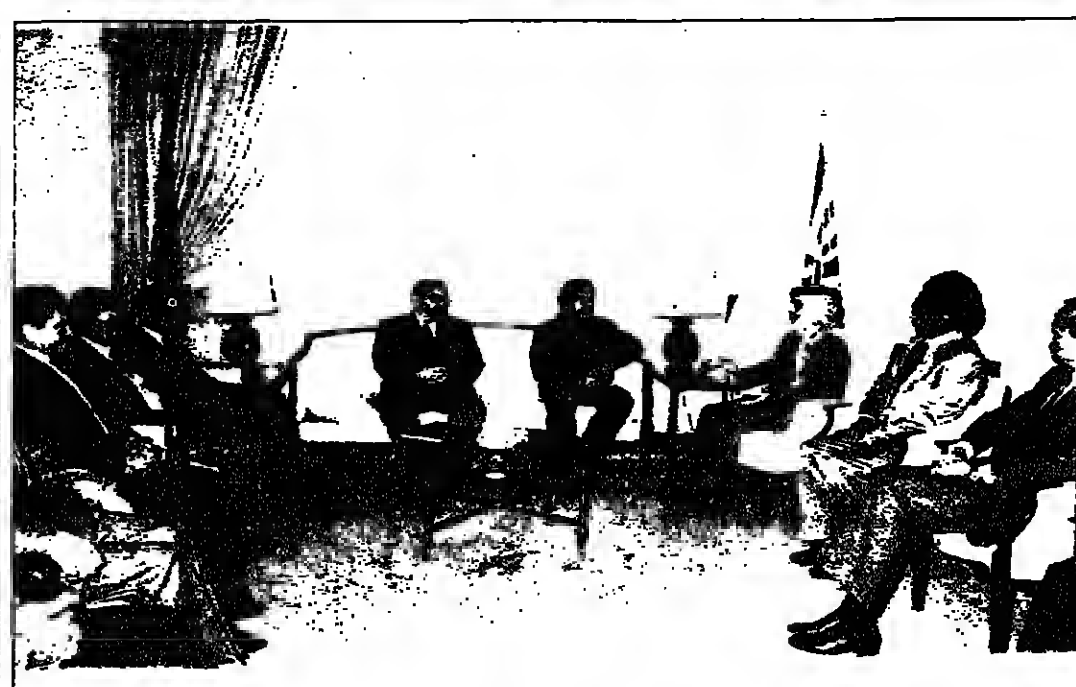
During the visit, the Iranian parliamentarians delivered a message to the Lower House of Parliament Speaker Abdul Latif Arabiyat from his Iranian counterpart Mehdi Karubi dealing with means of ending the Gulf crisis; and according to the joint statement, Arabiyat promised to prepare a reply to this message.

Following the statement, Arabiyat and the head of the Iranian team Mohammad Salamati held a joint press conference during which they underlined their de-

sire to increase Iranian-Jordanian meetings to discuss ways of countering common threats to the Islamic nation.

Arabiyat and Salamati said that Jordanian and Iranian parliamentarians held identical views with regard to common issues. Salamati told the press conference that Tehran regards Iraq's Friday peace initiative as a positive move and conforms to the peace bids proposed by the Iranian government.

Salamati said that he intended to convey to the Iranian government the outcome of the talks in Amman and to work towards promoting bilateral relations.



His Majesty King Hussein Saturday receives former Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega and members of the International Movement for Peace (Petra photo).

King praises Ortega plan, hopes peace process continues

AMMAN (J.T.) — His Majesty King Hussein Saturday paid tribute to the International Movement for Peace spearheaded by former Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, and he wished the movement success in bringing about an end to the Gulf war.

Speaking at a meeting attended by Ortega and his delegation at the Royal Court, King Hussein also voiced hope that peace mediation would contribute to a peaceful solution for all problems in the Middle East.

Ortega briefed the King on the movement's peace plan as offered at a press conference Friday evening. The six-point proposal calls on the U.N. Security Council to authorise the secretary-general "in coordination with the

government of Iraq" to announce his readiness to send U.N. observers to observe implementation of the plan, which calls for Baghdad to withdraw its forces from Kuwait.

Baghdad announced Friday its intention to withdraw from Kuwait to comply with Ortega's plan, which calls for an end to all economic sanctions on Iraq, proposes that the Security Council demand immediate resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, calls for convening an international peace conference on the Middle East and regional and international arrangements to solve the underlying economic, social, political and security problems of the area.

During the audience, Ortega

expressed his full support for Iraq's Friday acceptance and said it was now incumbent on his movement to follow up with world parliaments and peace groups to reach a ceasefire that would pave the way for a lasting peace.

Ortega thanked the King and the Kingdom for their hospitality.

Member of the group Abdul Aziz Belkhadem, who is also speaker of the Algerian Parliament lauded the King's efforts to end the conflict peacefully and he praised the Jordanian people's support and assistance to the Iraqi people.

Present at the audience were Chief of the Royal Court, Sharif Zeid Ben Shaker and the King's political advisor, Adnan Abu Odeh.

Attempted assault on Turkish airlines

AMMAN (J.T.) — In a further expression of Jordanian people's resentment of the ongoing aggression on Iraq and the participation of Turkey in the conflict, a Jordanian man Saturday stormed into the offices of the Turkish Airlines on Jabal Amman and seized one of its employees, threatening to blow up the place with a bomb.

According to the Public Security Department (PSD) the police were called to the scene of the incident and opened negotiations with the man, who also carried a knife, persuading him to give himself up.

The incident, which began at 10:00 in the morning, ended around 11:00 peacefully, with the unidentified man surrendering to the police who discovered that the bomb was a fake and that the man intended no harm to the employees.

The man told the police he was expressing his condemnation of the Turkish government's decision to allow U.S. warplanes to use Turkish territory to raid Iraqi civilian targets, including the civilian shelter in Baghdad which resulted in the death of hundreds of innocent people.

Also Saturday a 10-minute stoppage was observed at 10:00 at almost all businesses in the Kingdom in mourning over the death of the innocent people who died in the allied air raid on the Baghdad shelter.

The work stoppage was called by the Federation of Jordanian Labour Unions which issued a statement condemning the aggression and the killing of innocent civilians. This brutal bombardment of the shelter provides a proof of the criminal nature of the allied forces and their hostile attitude towards the Arab and Islamic nations.

The federation in a statement said the statement demanded that international community put an end to the aggression and said the Gulf crisis should be solved by the Arab countries.

Red Crescent sends 9th convoy to Iraq

By Mariam M. Shabbir
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The Jordanian Red Crescent Society sent the ninth convoy of trucks carrying essential medicines to war-torn Iraq today. Accompanying five trucks filled with the medicines are 13 members of the Gulf Peace Team, which have chosen to accompany the convoy hoping to spare the humanitarian aid to the Iraqis from being attacked by allied forces.

The leaving of the convoy to Iraq coincided with the passage of one month since the war began.

The Jordanian Red Crescent Society has taken it upon itself to provide humanitarian aid to Iraqis despite the dangerous route that they have to cross to get to Baghdad, said Dr. Adnan Abu

Koura, head of the Jordanian Red Crescent.

"We are a humanitarian organisation and we are fulfilling our duties despite all the obstacles that have been put in our way," Abu Koura told a press conference that was held a few hours before the convoy left for Baghdad Saturday evening.

Members of the Gulf Peace Team, a non-allied international group which seeks a peaceful end to the Gulf conflict, would be accompanying the convoy, said Gulf Peace Team spokesman Dr. Eric Hotchkins, to draw world attention to the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people. Humanitarian aid which the Iraqis "have been denied."

"We have asked for a ceasefire on the Baghdad-Amman road, so that the humanitarian help that the convoy is carrying can have

safe passage.... but we have received no guarantees of safety, we were told that the Amman-Baghdad road was a 'free-fire zone,'" Hotchkins, a medical doctor from Canada told the joint Red Crescent-Gulf Peace Team press conference.

Most of the 8 Red Crescent convoys that have gone to Iraq since the beginning of the war have returned to Jordan carrying civilian (mostly Jordanian) casualties, either from Baghdad or from hospitals on the Amman-Baghdad road, Abu Koura said.

Dr. Hotchkins said that the group and the Red Crescent had been requested to bring vaccines and intravenous infusion sets with them to Iraq as well as blood banks. "The requests we received were in line with what hospitals would most need in times of casualties which they would be

treating as a result of bombings," Hotchkins said.

Dr. Abu Koura told the press conference that Iraq imports an average of \$300 million worth of medicines every year. "Since the crisis began they have only been able to receive \$10 million worth of medicines, what that means is that they are badly in need of medicines," Abu Koura said.

Abu Koura said that most of the importation of medicines to Iraq had been stopped by the forces responsible for the implementation of the international trade embargo against Iraq that has been effective since last August.

Americans, Indians, Scottish, English, Irish, Dutch and Belgian nationals make up members of the Gulf Peace Team accompanying the five-truck Red Crescent convoy.

Get the coupons before Feb. 28

Ministry modifies food rationing plan

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Ministry of Supply said it expects Jordanians to get food coupons for the first four months of 1991 by the end of February, the last date for their distribution, and announced that 83 per cent of the total amount of coupons printed for the first quarter of the year have already reached the beneficiaries.

Ministry Secretary-General Radi Ibrahim also announced that by May 1, the ministry will distribute coupons not only for the second quarter but rather for the rest of the year to save citizens the extra trip for the coupons.

From May to December, the coupons will be in two colours. One will serve for the second quarter and the other for the last four months of 1991.

According to Ibrahim, food coupons for 1992 will be distributed altogether in January 1992 to save residents the inconvenience of making several trips.

During 1992, the coupons will be in three different colours, one for each quarter of the year.

According to the 1991 budget, the government plans to spend JD 46 million on food subsidies provided that the prices of commodities remain unchanged, the

exchange rate of the Jordanian dinar remains steady, and consumption does not increase, Ibrahim said in a prepared statement quoted by the Jordan News Agency, Petra.

Ibrahim noted that the Ministry of Supply would continue its policy of ensuring sufficient strategic supplies of wheat, rice, sugar, lentils and milk in its warehouses to face any emergency.

He said government warehouses and silos around the country contain sufficient stocks of these commodities; and that cold storage facilities are stocked with frozen poultry, and meat sufficient for many months.

The ministry's policy of preserving stocks of strategic food supplies has succeeded in ensuring the country's needs for the past five months, Ibrahim said.

The official disclosed that recently the ministry had problems with exporters declining to sell food commodities to Jordan because of extra freight and insurance charges and delays in cargo vessels reaching Aqaba port.

But, he said, that the government was able to overcome those hurdles and maintain normal import levels.

Ibrahim also noted that the

Kingdom's consumption of flour had lately increased, largely because large numbers of Jordanian expatriates have returned to the country along with the presence of evacuees arriving here from Kuwait and Iraq and the increased local demand on flour to meet emergencies.

He said food coupons have helped the ministry control public food consumption. The latest statistical figures indicate that consumption of rice and sugar remained around average, but that milk consumption increased because the ministry is now distributing three kilograms of powdered milk for each citizen per quarter; up from two kilograms.

The coupons also helped put an end to the hoarding because residents can only buy limited amounts of rice, sugar and milk at subsidised prices.

To stop smuggling of food to neighbouring states, Ibrahim pointed out, the food coupons were introduced shortly after the outbreak of the Gulf crisis in light of increased signs of hoarding.

Ibrahim said the ministry will announce any changes in the food coupons distribution centres in due course.

the question of how he would travel came up at a U.S. military command briefing for reporters.

Marine Brigadier General Richard Neal, the senior command spokesman, said in reply to questions that "all Iraqi aircraft are hostile.... we control the airspace, we're at war, we're trying to enforce the U.N. resolutions, and I don't know who the passengers are on any aircraft flying over the Iraqi theater of operations."

"But if they are flying over the Iraqi theater of operations, they are at great, extreme risk."

Cheney

(Continued from page 1)
'Aziz will not be safe'

In Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, U.S. officials said Mr. Aziz would face "great, extreme risk" of being shot down if he tries to fly out of Baghdad on his weekend diplomatic mission to Moscow.

Mr. Aziz is to meet with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet capital Monday, and

NATIONAL NEWS IN BRIEF

Prince Abdullah visits Youth Ministry

AMMAN (Petra) — His Royal Highness Prince Abdullah Ben Al Hussein Saturday visited the Ministry of Youth where he was briefed by Culture and Youth Minister Khaled Al Karaki on the ministry's role in the present stage and preparations taken by the ministry's cadres, clubs, youth centres and scouts and guides gathering to face emergency circumstances. Prince Abdullah was also briefed on the ministry's plans and aspirations. The meeting was attended by the ministry's secretary-general Eid Al Fayer, Al Hussein Youth City Director General Issam Arida and several of the ministry's officials.

Azem explains objectives of ministry

ZARQA (Petra) — Social Development Minister Yusef Al Azem said Saturday his ministry has a distinguished role represented in aiding and supporting citizens through extending financial assistance to them and training them on different professions. During a visit to Zarqa Governorate, Azem said the ministry is working in accordance with His Majesty King Hussein's directives calling for investigating the citizens' needs and making them productive members of the society by training the unemployed on different professions. The ministry, he said, is seriously attempting to increase the capital of the National Aid Fund (NAF), by holding pioneering and charity projects. The capital of the NAF is estimated currently at JD 5 million.

Tal clarifies higher education system

AMMAN (Petra) — Higher Education Minister Saeed Al Tal said Saturday community college education was a basis for university education, not only an extension of the secondary education period. This, he added, made it necessary to adapt the community college curricula to the university education system. In a meeting with the teaching staff of Hawwara Community College, Tal affirmed that the higher education ministry is reviewing the community colleges' situations to develop the education quality in them.

Officials inspect civil defence preparations

KARAK (Petra) — Chairman and members of Al Qasr district civil defence committee Saturday inspected Al Rabba and Al Yarout towns' preparations to face emergency situations. Al Rabba Mayor Musa Al Majali told the committee that 50 shelters were prepared in the town and that several shelters and evacuation centres were provided with civil defence equipment. Chairman of the civil defence committee, Nahar Al Dala'in commended Al Rabba town's preparations.

Deputies to visit Pakistan, Turkey, Algeria

AMMAN (J.T.) — A Jordanian parliamentary delegation will leave Amman Monday for talks with parliamentarians in Turkey and Pakistan, about ways to end the Gulf crisis.

A statement released Saturday said the delegation would include Ishaq Al Farhan, Ali Al Fagir and Fuad Khalafat.

A separate parliament statement said a team of Jordanian deputies would leave for Algeria to participate in the Arab Parliamentary Union (APU) meeting on Feb. 25.

Leading the team is Lower House of Parliament Speaker Abdul Latif Arabiyat. The team will include deputies Thoukan Hindawi, Abdallah Ensour, Ahmad Azzaidah and Mohammad Tarawneh.

The Lower House of Parliament also announced that its administrative committee would meet Sunday under the chairmanship of Jamal Khreisha to review questions raised by the Audit Bureau and in a report by the Civil Service Commission on recruiting government employees.

The House legal committee will also meet Sunday to discuss a new copyright law designed to protect playwrights.

The financial committee meanwhile met to discuss the Central Bank of Jordan laws.

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Chairman of the Board of Directors:
MAHMOUD AL KAYED

Director General:
MOHAMMAD AMAD

Editor-in-Chief:
GEORGE S. HAWATMEH

Editorial and advertising offices:

Jordan Press Foundation,
University Road, P.O. Box 6710, Amman, Jordan.

Telephones: 667171/6, 670141-4

Telex: 21497 ALRAI JO

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CAI out of sync

SINCE THE leaders of the Coalition Against Iraq (CAI) admittedly base their war in the Gulf on the U.N. Security Council resolution 678 and derive the legitimacy of their actions from it and the U.N. organ that adopted that decision, they have no right on their own to accept or reject the Iraqi peace overture announced Friday. By calling the Iraqi acceptance of resolution 660 a "cruel hoax," CAI chief George Bush gave himself an authority to accept or reject the Baghdad offer which he clearly does not have. The same applies to French President Francois Mitterrand and British Prime Minister John Major who also precipitously rejected outright the Iraqi offer of peace. Only the U.N. Security Council has the power and mandate to pass judgement on the Iraqi initiative and not the U.S., France or Britain. The first order of business, therefore, should be to convene formally and publicly the U.N. Security Council to examine Iraq's Feb. 15 response to its primary resolution adopted on the Gulf crisis. Then and only then can the Iraqi acceptance of resolution 660 be deemed satisfactory or not.

As to the claim by Washington, London and Paris that the Iraqi acceptance of resolution 660 was made conditional and therefore contrary to the spirit of its initial decision, it is pertinent to point out that Iraq's linkage of its acceptance of resolution 660 is not in the most part "conditions" per se. The call for rescinding all the Council resolutions that were adopted in the wake of Iraq's initial refusal of that first resolution cannot be construed as a condition. It will be recalled that the Council resolutions that were adopted after Security Council resolution 660 and culminated in Security Council resolution 678 have become redundant and moot legally and politically. Even if Baghdad did not request their official annulment, they became automatically devoid of legal and political significance since they were all based on Iraq's rejection of resolution 660. With regard to the call for the withdrawal of foreign troops from the Gulf region, this is also not a condition but rather a natural and logical consequence of Iraq's acceptance of the principle to withdraw from Kuwait. It so happens that this understanding is also shared by Iran and other powers notably the Soviet Union.

It is also preposterous to label Iraq's call for a fair distribution of wealth or the establishment of a new security arrangement on the basis of the aspirations of the peoples of the area and free of the hegemony being contemplated by Washington and London as caveats that run against the Council resolutions on the Kuwaiti situation. As a matter of fact such yearnings by Iraq and many of its neighbours are in complete harmony with the U.N. Charter and the relevant U.N. resolutions. The same goes for Iraq's call for the effective resolution of the Arab-Palestinian conflicts, something that the entire international community subscribes to with perhaps few exceptions. One can go on explaining the propositions that Iraq's principles for peace in the Gulf and Middle East regions are not conditions but rather guidelines or understanding that cannot be part and parcel of the peace formula for the Gulf and Middle East regions.

Instead of brushing aside Iraq's bold peace offer as a "cruel hoax," it would be prudent to reflect on it first and then request the Security Council to act on it. Washington, London and Paris therefore have acted out of line.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

President Bush has committed a grave blunder by rejecting Iraq's announcement Friday that it would deal with U.N. Security Council resolution 660 with the aim of reaching an honourable and acceptable solution for the Gulf crisis, said Al Ra'i daily Saturday. Bush had earlier committed two other mistakes by first abjuring Jordan's mediation efforts to reach a peaceful settlement and second by opting for war in a haste to settle the crisis without waiting for Iraq to take a positive step towards a final settlement, the paper noted. By outright rejection the Iraqi announcement without consultations with his allies and the Soviet Union, Bush has thus proved once again that his real intention is not to see the crisis resolved but rather to see Iraq destroyed, the paper continued. Bush, as everyone realises, is intent on pursuing the conflict in order to secure domination of the oil wealth of the Arabian Peninsula and to ensure Israel's continued military superiority over the Arab states, the paper added. Bush's speedy reaction could have come for the purpose of denying Moscow any chance of exercising a positive role to settle the crisis in a manner that would ensure the departure of American and allied forces from the Gulf, the paper said. Al Ra'i noted that Washington's drive to abort the Soviet bid to end the crisis is no less sinister than his earlier move which aborted the Jordanian-Arab mediation efforts to reach a settlement.

A columnist in Al Ra'i newspaper tackles a decision by the Higher Education Council to refrain from issuing further licences for more universities or community colleges in the Amman area because of the congestion of community colleges in this region. Nazih notes that in Amman region the University of Jordan exists alongside a multitude of community colleges which have been absorbing increasing numbers of school graduates every year. Amman area also has a private university, the first of its kind in the Kingdom and one that has absorbed additional numbers of students lately, says the writer. Referring to the northern region, the writer says that it has Yarmouk University and the Jordan University of Science and Technology; and in the south, there is Mu'ta University. Nazih says that all these universities plus the multitude of community colleges around the Kingdom offer a good chance to a large number of school graduates to acquire higher education. But, he notes, that the schools which now educate more than a million students, are expected to turn out more and more numbers of tawjihi graduates who, under the present economic difficulties can by no means go abroad for study.

British bombing when the natives were restless

By David Omissi

SADDAM HUSSEIN was not the first to use chemical weapons against the Iraqi population. General Sir Aylmer Haldane commanded the British forces which effectively ruled Iraq after its conquest by the British during the World War I. When the tribesmen of the Euphrates rose in rebellion against British military rule in the summer of 1920, the British army used gas, shells — "with excellent moral effect" — in the fighting which followed.

Unsurprisingly, the rebellion was crushed — with the loss of nearly 9,000 Arab lives. Freed to impose their political will in Iraq, the British, then created a client kingdom, under Faisal Ibn Hussain, the son of the Sharif of Mecca. The British did not want Faisal to appear a puppet, so held a referendum in 1921 — and almost certainly fixed its result — to give some legitimacy to his appointment.

The British armed forces underlined this indirect imperialism. Winston Churchill, Colonial Secretary from 1921, believed that British members could control the dissident Iraqi tribesmen. Some army officers feared such methods might be too brutal, but despite this they were adopted because they promised to be very cheap. In 1922, the Air Ministry took over the defence of the new kingdom.

Like Saddam's bombers, the squadrons of the Royal Air Force flew most of their missions against the Kurds who resented rule from Baghdad. For 10 years the British waged an almost continuous bombing

campaign in the oil-rich and mountainous north-east against the Kurdish rebels, to whom they had earlier promised autonomy.

The Iraqi air force — which the British had built up, trained and equipped — carried on the work after Iraq became nominally independent in 1932.

Churchill consistently urged that the RAF should use mustard gas during these raids, despite the warning by one of his advisers that "it may... kill children and sickly persons, more especially as the people against whom we intend to use it have no medical knowledge with which to supply antidotes." In the event the air force did not use gas bombs — for technical rather than humanitarian reasons.

Even without gas the campaign was brutal enough. Some Iraqi villages were destroyed merely because their inhabitants had not paid their taxes. The British authorities always maintained in public, however, that people were not bombed for refusing to pay — merely for refusing to appear when summoned to explain non-payment.

The primitive bombs sometimes did not explode, and tribal children developed a passion for playing with the duds. When the air force proposed using bombs with delayed action fuses, one senior officer protested that the result would be "blowing a lot of children to pieces." Nevertheless, the RAF went ahead — without the knowledge of the civilian High Commissioner for Iraq.

Sir Henry Dobbs — because delayed-action bombs prevented tribesmen from tending their crops under cover of darkness.

Churchill was sometimes troubled by the realities of the methods he had supported. During one raid in Iraq, British pilots machine-gunned women and children as they fled from their homes. "To fire wilfully on women and children taking refuge in a lake is a disgraceful act," Churchill protested to the Chief of the Air Staff. "I am surprised you do not order the officers responsible for it to be tried by court martial." No action was taken, and this incident was quietly forgotten.

This "police bombing" was too much for some air force officers to stomach. In 1924, a distinguished Air Commodore, Lionel Charlton, resigned his post as a staff officer in Iraq after he visited a hospital and saw the victims of British bombing recovering from their injuries. The air force recalled him to England, promising not to otherwise damage his career provided he took his protests no further; but they went back on their word and placed him on the retired list in 1928.

Other officers seemed to enjoy the work. One who did was Arthur Harris, who would later achieve fame directing the bomber offensive against Germany in the World War II. Known to his friends as Bom-

ber and to his enemies a Butcher, he first practised his trade against Kurdish villages in Iraq.

"Where the Arab and Kurd had just begun to realise that if they could stand a little noise, they could stand bombing, and still argue," he reported after one raid in 1924, "they now know what real bombing means, in casualties and damage; they now know that within 45 minutes a full-sized village can be practically wiped out and a third of its inhabitants killed or injured by four or five machines which offer them no real target, no opportunity for glory as warriors, no effective means of escape."

The British employed "police bombing" elsewhere in the empire — in Transjordan, against the Pathan tribesmen on the northwest frontier of India; in the Aden Protectorate (now the southern part of Yemen); and against the Nuer people of the southern Sudan.

The Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Hugh Trenchard, had great ambitions for his bombers. In a paper written early in 1920, when some politicians feared a revolution in Britain, he suggested that the RAF could even suppress "industrial disturbances or risings" in England itself. Churchill was horrified, and demanded that Trenchard never refer to the proposal again, at least not in writing.

DAVID OMISSI is a Research Fellow at Nuffield College, Oxford. His book, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force 1919-1939*, is published by Manchester University Press.

LETTERS

Psychology of U.S. worries

To the Editor:

Last year, I read an article in Time magazine entitled "Will 21st Century be American Century?" The columnist, a senior editor of Time, concluded that 21st century (as the twentieth century's been) will be American century. He tried to convince the readers with his long explanations about democracy and freedom values he claimed were the great contribution of USA to the world. He emphasised too the great achievements of the USA in computer technology and other sciences.

But now, especially since Jan. 17, 1991, I can assure you that "twenty-first century will not be American century." By bombing and killing thousands civilians in Iraq and Kuwait, "the United States has proved to the world its commitment to freedom and democracy. By using and 'testing' its killing machines — like Tomahawk missiles, F-16, F-111, F-15, F-117A Stealth bombers, cluster bombs, smart bombs — on the Arab civilians, the U.S. has proved to the world "its great achievements in science and technology."

Why has the U.S. done all of this, even when many people all over the world — including American people — do not agree with its foreign policy? President George Bush had told the world peace demonstrations and rallies will not change his policy on this Gulf war.

We can understand its attitude by psychology. Americans have a kind of "superpower syndrome." They like and always like to be superpower and to be treated as such. But our world, now and then, tends to be a world with many superpowers. The Soviet Union has collapsed. But at the same time we have seen the growing of (united) Germany, Japan, the European Community, new industrialised countries (Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea), and many other "superpowers" in many regions. Iraq, if it can unite the Arab Nation as it claimed, is very likely to be another superpower!

That's why the Americans started worrying about their position in the world, about the "threats" toward their wealth and lifestyle, and about decreasing of their influence (especially in the Middle East and the Gulf region which has the biggest oil reserve in the world).

If we monitor Gulf war news, we can hear their headline voices. The best examples are Bush's speeches. But if we look into their heart, there are some worries, big worries. The U.S. started to lose its self-confidence. So, in their unconscious mind, it felt the need to prove itself about the existence of its power. Headline voices and intolerance are not indicative of your strength, but rather your weakness. Intolerance and "no compromise attitude" are indicative of your insecure feeling.

From this point, we've got the clear explanation about "U.S. need of adventures" in Grenada, Panama... and now Iraq. But Iraq is not Grenada or Panama. "Gulf war will not be another Vietnam," said Bush. He was right. Iraq is not Vietnam indeed. But Iraq is a Muslim country and about 60 per cent of its population is Shi'ite, like Iran. So the disaster Bush made for his country will be a greater one.

Now anti-Americanism is spreading all over the world, even in my country, Indonesia, which has a long good relationship with the USA. Indonesia now is the biggest Muslim country in the world. Ninety per cent of its 179 million people are Muslim. Now my Indonesian people is starting to face the truth about what the USA is.

Satrio Aristomandar,
ADDRESS: Harijan Kompas,
Jl. Palmerah Selatan 26-28,
Jakarta 10270, Indonesia.

Address in Amman:
Hotel Amman Training
Jabal Amman Room 325

Stop

To the Editor:

I am writing this letter in response to the letter by "An odd and even victim". First of all we are in a war!! Jordan is being punished by the coalition for its moral stand in the Gulf war. I think we should count ourselves lucky that we only face a shortage of fuel.

What about the Iraqis!! They have no medicine, no food, people have lost their homes, children, wives, husbands and yet people have the nerve to complain about using their car every other day!! Instead of being so petty, maybe we should realise that petrol,

water and a lot of other natural resources that we take for granted should be appreciated during these difficult times and in the future. At least we have our homes, our heat, our electricity, and most of all our lives!! So stop complaining and thank God that's all you have to complain about!

Mrs. C. Younis

More about PoWs

On Feb. 7, the British ambassador to Jordan, Mr. Anthony Reeve, published a letter in the Jordan Times, which he sent to the Jordanian Students Union on the subject of Iraqi detainees in Britain. In the letter, Mr. Reeve stated how well the Iraqi detainees were treated in Britain and questioned the treatment of the PoWs who are serving with the multinational forces in the Gulf and being held in Iraq.

While reading your letter, Mr. Reeve, I was wondering if you possibly have been looking for a heart since yours seems to be malfunctioning. Because you are the British ambassador to Jordan, you should be more aware of the sentiments felt here as well as those expressed in most of the Arab World.

Some ambassadors reap spiritual profits because they develop an awareness of other people and their cultures and grow to understand that each country has an inherent positive beauty. These ambassadors who profit from touching different citizens of humanity return to their respective countries enriched and so further enrich their own societies.

Apparently this enrichment has not quite reached your mind or heart, for then you would understand the madness that is being carried out by your country as a partner to the American-led coalition against the innocent people of Iraq. If you have any kind of conscience, you would be ashamed of the position Britain has taken in this conflict and do your best to protest the mass murder of Iraqis and call for an immediate ceasefire and advocate peace.

You mentioned Articles 19 and 23 of the Third Geneva Convention which state that no prisoner of war may at any time be sent to or detained in areas where he may be exposed to the fire of the combat zones nor may his presence be used to render certain points or areas immune from military operations. First, permit me to state that the allied POW who was killed in Iraq was said to have died not in a military installation, but in a residential area demonstrating the fact that the relentless bombing of Iraq is indeed directed at civilians with the premeditated intention of destroying all facets of Iraqi culture, including their socio-economic infrastructure. Think, Mr. Reeve, that these planes are bombing terror-stricken babies and children who with their mothers, grandparents and other civilians are not safe in their homes wherever they may live in all Iraq!! I do not advocate violence, but these allied PoWs are very lucky the Iraqi people have kept them whole and did not vent their anger and cut their captives into pieces while still alive!

Is it all right for Israel to place the Palestinians they have imprisoned without trial as human shields in military and strategic installations of Israel? Can you condone the treatment of Israeli held Palestinians while condemning the treatment of the allied PoWs held in Iraq? The same principles must be applied to all peoples regardless of Zionist doctrines and prejudices that the Americans and their cohorts echo.

Can you also guarantee fair treatment of the Iraqi PoWs held by the allied forces? Under what conditions will these prisoners be placed when the most sophisticated means of interrogation will be used by the "civilised" multinational forces who have already demonstrated they have no compassion for any non-coalition Arab. War is a very dirty business.

Look around you, Mr. Reeve. Arab blood is running in the streets of Iraqi cities. Some Jordanian blood has also been shed because we have been brave enough to stand on the side of truth.

The coalition of the multinational forces is a Witches Sabbath, a nocturnal gathering of witches in which obedience to the devil is practised. The terrible holocaust that is being enacted is not just a crime against Iraq, but a crime against all mankind.

When passing judgment, you must use the same standards concerning all issues at stake here. The use of double standards has enabled the Palestinian problem to fester for 44 years while America and its allies stormed in to rescue the evil monarchy of Kuwait as a pretext to plunder and murder a noble Arab people as well as assassinate President Saddam Hussein, the great Iraqi leader who all decent Arabs admire and love.

We, the people of Jordan, look to America, Britain and all the other 28 coalition countries to recognise the humanitarian needs of all Iraqi people and to use the United Nations as a body to bring about a just and lasting peace, not a war on babies and children!

E. Yaghi,
Amman.

Sunday's Economic Pulse

Foreign exchange availability in 1991

By Dr. Fahed Fanek

How will the Jordanian national economy fare under protracted war circumstances? Will foreign exchange continue to be available to finance the essential needs of the country in the form of basic food, raw materials, energy and other material?

Economic consultants, commissioned by the European Community, surveyed the Jordanian economy and concluded that the foreign exchange gap in the balance of payments for 1991 will be in the order of \$1700 million, including around \$1000 million to serve the external debt, and \$700 million to cover the difference between total earnings and minimum expected disbursements of foreign exchange, before taking into account foreign aid.

Jordan, of course, will not be expected to resume repayment of installments and interest due to the lenders of Paris Club and London Club until after satisfying its own basic needs. Foreign aid in 1991 should therefore exceed \$700 million simply to accommodate the people's essential needs before any debt service.

However, it is not possible to freeze debt service due to the countries that are extending fresh credit. Jordan cannot possibly refuse to repay a small instalment due to Japan for example, when Japan is extending a new loan of \$450 million. Debt repayment will inevitably continue to those lenders who agree to provide financial aid to Jordan, as long as the fresh credit exceeded repayments, and Jordan continued to be a net receiver of capital.

Thus the minimum aid required by Jordan to make ends meet has to be recalculated to include not the \$700 million, but also the unavoidable debt service to the countries and institutions that come to Jordan's side for financial help, such as Japan, Germany, European Community, the World Bank, Arab funds and other bilateral lenders.

Assuming that the unavoidable debt service will be in the neighbourhood of \$400 million in 1991, the minimum gross aid which should be received by Jordan in 1991 should be no less than \$1100 million, in the forms of both grants and soft loans.

The current indications point out that the European Community will provide \$210 million as a grant to finance imports from Europe. Japan will extend a soft loan of \$450 million to finance Japanese exports, and the World Bank will provide a conditional loan to support the balance of payments, which will be released upon compliance with certain policies, measures and targets yet to be agreed upon with the IMF. This week Germany told Jordan that a grant of \$100 million will be issued to Jordan to finance imports not necessarily originating from Germany.

Unless the United States goes after us, and uses its influence to prevent Japan, Germany, Europe, and the World Bank from honouring their commitments in order to punish the Jordanian people for expressing their national feelings towards Iraq and the war, the total aid expected in 1991 will be around \$960 million. In this case, the remaining gap of \$140 million will have to be secured one way or another. This is not an easy job, but it is not totally impossible. There are small financial contributions expected from Belgium, Taiwan, Korea, Canada, the Netherlands, Italy and others. Some of these commitments are free from any strings, others are tied to imports, and a third portion is tied to food supplies.

If this overall sketch materialised, foreign exchange will continue to be available through 1991, 1992 is too far to lend itself to planning or even projection and speculation. The Jordanian government will continue to administer the economy on a cash management basis with a short term horizon.

Iranians want to keep out

By Eric Hall
Renter

DUBAI — A few Iranians can hear the bombs falling. If President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani has his way they will be the only ones to feel the heat of the Gulf war.

Accustomed to the shrill anti-Western rhetoric of revolutionary Iran in the 1980s, politicians and military commanders in the U.S.-led coalition fighting to evict Iraq from Kuwait have doubted Iranian neutrality.

But the word from Tehran is they have little cause for worry.

Diplomats in Tehran and analysts say Rafsanjani genuinely wants to stay neutral and that the vast majority of Iran's 55 million citizens are behind him.

Diehard radicals still call for jihad (holy war) against the West but for the time being most Iranians back Rafsanjani because of his moderate social and economic policies, analysts say.

Along the western border, Iranians can see and feel the joists of the allied bombardment around Iraqi cities such as Basra. Some have caught sight of Iraqi planes fleeing to safety in Iran.

Most Iranians are anxious to stay out of a war not of their making.

Impoverished by a decade of Islamic revolution and the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war and harried by junior clerics dictating moral standards, Rafsanjani's promises of a better, more tolerant life come as a relief.

Buyed by public support, the pragmatic president has overriden opposition.

"We trust Rafsanjani ... Rafsanjani will deal with things," are stock responses from Iranians asked about government policies.

Unseen surprises in the war, such as Israeli military involvement, could still push Iran to-

wards Iraq.

Iranian and Western analysts doubt it would send troops to help Iraq but it could cause problems for coalition forces by sending food, oil, and ammunition, or by releasing Iraqi aircraft which have fled there.

Analysts stress that significant changes are under way in Iran.

Since taking office two years ago after the death of the revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Rafsanjani has concentrated on how to rebuild the economy. He has begun to offer a less strident form of state Islam.

At a weekly prayer gathering in December, Rafsanjani said Islam was a religion meant to make people's lives easier, not harder.

Although Iranians harbour bitter memories of their war with Iraq, some sympathise with Iraqis caught under the allied air bombing. Tehran residents say. Like many Muslims they also derive satisfaction from Iraqi missile attacks against Israel.

But radicals' calls for a holy war against the West have met with popular apathy and criticism from many parliamentary deputies.

At the height of the revolution, clerics such as Ayatollah Mousavi Ardebili were men of great influence.

Last month, Ardebili told a prayer meeting an average family of four to five needed 180,000 rials (about \$140 at the most widely used free market rate) to survive.

Ardebili urged Iranians to economise and lead "a simple life" — a phrase redolent with moral goodness, and Islamic piety.

Nowadays Iranians are near scornful of this sort of advice at a time when few workers earn enough to cope with soaring inflation and must rely on a second job, or corruption to feed their families.

King

(Continued from page 1)

demands included in your peaceful initiative are legitimate, pan-Arab and national and conform with Arab aspirations and international legitimacy. We do not believe that a single Arab can oppose these demands or reject them.

"I wish you, your brothers, Iraq and the Iraqi people success, and hope that this initiative will serve as another chance for all to see the truth about your position and your genuine intentions on fully respecting all international principles and resolutions so that the Arab Muslim people of Iraq and the Arab and Islamic nation will once again enjoy security and stability.

"We hope to see various parties to the area's conflicts display favourable and equal response to your responsible initiative and also to the aspirations of mankind. May God's peace be upon you."

Foreign Minister Taber Al Masri summoned the ambassadors of China, the Soviet Union, Spain, Yugoslavia and Iraq for separate meetings Saturday to discuss the Iraqi peace initiative.

Petra said Mr. Masri's contact were aimed at "mobilising diplomatic efforts to bring about a ceasefire and support the Iraqi initiative," and that he discussed with them "the best ways to achieve that goal in a legitimate, balanced and comprehensive way."

In his meeting with the Spanish ambassador, Mr. Masri stressed "the need for the European Community to deal with the Iraqi initiative quickly and positively," Petra reported.

It said the meeting with Yugoslavia's ambassador, whose country heads the Non-Aligned Movement, "concentrated on the necessary steps to be undertaken by the head of the movement and its members, especially those who are members of the United Nations Security Council."

Petra said Mr. Masri urged the Soviet Union to support Iraq's proposal "since its main factors depended on the Soviet ideas which were pointed out in the joint American-Soviet statement recently."

That statement was issued last month after a meeting between U.S. Secretary of State James Baker and Soviet Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh.

The joint statement said outstanding Middle Eastern problems would be tackled after the settlement of the Gulf crisis. This was seen initially as a U.S. acceptance of linkage of the two issues.

Petra said the Foreign Ministry was expected to pursue further diplomatic efforts to follow up on the Iraqi initiative.

Information Minister Ibrahim Izzeddine said Saturday Jordan saw a significant shift in Iraq's position in accepting the principle of withdrawal from Kuwait.

"There is a significant shift in the Iraqi position by accepting in a very clear manner Resolution 660... by accepting it they accept international legitimacy," Mr. Izzeddine told a daily news briefing.

"We hope that the second step will be a ceasefire and negotiations."

Mr. Izzeddine said there had been a positive reaction to Baghdad's announcement from the Soviet Union, and he hoped this would reactivate the Security Council in its search for peace.

"It would be undermining all

concepts of reasons to reject this (Iraqi initiative) out of hand," he added.

The minister, a former ambassador to Washington, said he detected a slight divergence between the White House and the U.S. State Department.

While President George Bush had rejected the Iraqi offer, Mr. Izzeddine said the State Department had said "that Iraq's acceptance of Resolution 660 and the concept of withdrawal is rather positive."

"It is safe to say we have new grounds to think things are moving into new areas for a peaceful settlement," he said.

Yemen welcomed the Iraqi offer and called on the U.N. Security Council to issue a Gulf war ceasefire resolution.

It also called on Arab partners in the 28-nation, U.S.-led coalition fighting Iraq since Jan. 17 to pull out their troops and ban the use of their territories by foreign forces.

The Tunisian government called the Iraqi move a "positive" initiative and hoped it would allow the parties to the conflict "to realise security, stability and peace in the world."

"The Tunisian government welcomes with satisfaction the announcement by Iraq that it is ready to cooperate to apply U.N. Resolution 660," a Foreign Ministry statement said.

It said Tunisia hoped "this positive initiative would be met with cooperation to allow a halt to fighting and the resolution of the conflict, guaranteeing a just and permanent solution to the region's problems, in particular the Palestinian issue."

Algeria said the allies' rejection of Baghdad's peace offer revealed their true Gulf war aim — the destruction of Iraq.

"Since the outbreak of the crisis last August 2 (they) members of the anti-Iraq coalition kept saying and repeating that all Iraq had to do to end the crisis was utter a word on withdrawal from Kuwait," Foreign Minister Sid Ahmad Ghozali told reporters.

"For first time the Iraqi government was expressing its readiness to withdraw from Kuwait... if there is no response to this initiative it means the war has another objective than to apply U.N. resolutions. That is, what we had feared, the destruction of Iraq."

A Moroccan daily expressed the same opinion.

Baghdad's offer "embarrasses the allies because if they reject this new peace offer they clearly demonstrate that the liberation of Kuwait is only a cover and a pretext for destroying Iraq's military and industrial potential," said the 'Opinion paper published by the old-guard Istiqlal Party.

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood welcomed the Iraqi offer and urged all Muslim countries to back talks for a Gulf war truce.

"The latest Iraqi initiative calling for a ceasefire included important positive elements worthy of total appreciation and welcome," the group said.

Mauritania praised the Iraqi offer, but neighbouring Senegal rejected it.

Mauritania said the Iraqi proposal "offers the international community a way to avoid catastrophe."

Senegal, which supports the allies and has sent a 500-man force to the Gulf, called the Iraqi proposal unacceptable because it linked withdrawal from Kuwait to the resolution of other Middle East issues.

Indian Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar welcomed the Iraqi move and called for a positive

response from the U.S.-led coalition.

Mr. Shekhar appealed to both President Bush and Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to use this step to find areas of agreement and not areas of discord.

Bangladesh, a member of the U.S.-led force ranged against Iraq, welcomed the Iraqi offer, saying it could lead to peace in the Gulf.

The official BSS news agency quoted presidential adviser on foreign affairs Fakhruddin Ahmad as saying that Bangladesh viewed the offer "with a great sign of relief."

The door to peace opened by the Iraqi offer should not be slammed shut again, Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas said.

"For the first time Iraq is prepared at least to discuss withdrawal, although tied to several other things. The door that had been completely closed has now been opened. Don't let's close it again," he said after meeting President Suharto.

Mr. Alatas, recently returned from a meeting on non-aligned countries in Belgrade, said he hoped for more and deeper dialogue between interested nations.

Arafat

(Continued from page 1)

The Palestinian leader countered all questions about the conditions attached to the Iraqi initiative by posing a query why the international community did not adopt the same measures and punitive action against Israel for its refusal to comply with Security Council resolutions on the Palestinian problem as it did against Iraq for its invasion of Kuwait.

Mr. Arafat described as "silly" a question whether the PLO was finding itself politically weak because of its support for Iraq in the conflict. But, he warned, "there will be no peace, no stability, no solution in the Middle East if the rights of the Palestinian people and the PLO's role are" sidelined.

"There is O.I.L. and there is P.L.O.," he said, spelling words out. "This is Saddam's initiative," he added in an obvious reference to the inevitability of the PLO's involvement in any peace process in the region.

Mr. Arafat also implicitly confirmed that the initiative that Iraq announced Friday was one emanated by the International Movement for Peace when he said that Iraq was also calling for a solution to the Cyprus problem on the basis of U.N. Security Council resolutions.

The proposal of the International Movement for Peace, headed by Nicaraguan leader Daniel Ortega, unveiled in Amman on Friday, is the only recent initiative so far to contain any reference to the problem of Cyprus, where Security Council resolutions have failed to bring about a Turkish withdrawal from the island.

According to sources close to Mr. Ortega, the PLO chairman took the initiative to President Saddam last week and secured his approval.

Mr. Arafat also said President Saddam had informed King Hussein, Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh and "other Arab leaders" of his initiative prior to its formal announcement Friday.

Mr. Arafat said President Saddam had told him that the losses Iraq suffered so far in the allied assault were much lower than he had expected.

"Before meeting President

Saddam, I was a little bit worried about his military position after what I read and heard from different sources about his losses, but believe me he was full of confidence and gave me more optimism and encouraged me more and more," Mr. Arafat said.

Comparing the allied assault on Iraq with his own experience in Beirut in 1982 when the Lebanese capital was under siege by invading Israeli forces, Mr. Arafat expressed confidence that the Iraqi leadership was in a position to prolong the war if need be.

In Beirut, "which is nine square kilometres... I had no tanks, no weapons and there was no water and power" under the Israeli siege, he recalled. "Still I survived for three months. Iraq is 400,000 square kilometres and President Saddam reassured me that Iraq remains strong and if they (the allies) reject the peace initiative and continue the war then the Iraqis are ready for them."

Mr. Arafat characterised as "unbelievable" President Bush's suggestion to the Iraqi people that the war could come to an end if they overthrew President Saddam. "Is it inciting a people to rise up against their president part of the American democracy?" he asked. "Or is it the new world order that they are planning for?"

He also questioned why President Bush had gone back on his earlier statements that "they (the allies) had nothing against Saddam Hussein."

The Palestinian leader raised a scenario of non-conventional weapons being used in the conflict in the ground war. "The Americans and British are training their soldiers to use non-conventional weapons," he said. "Saddam Hussein made it clear to me that if they use non-conventional weapons, then Iraq will retaliate with non-conventional weapons," he said.

Asked what kind of weapons Iraq might possibly use, he said simply: "If I knew I would tell you."

Mr. Arafat said Sunday's scheduled visit to Moscow by Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz was aimed at continuing "the important dialogue" between the Soviet and Iraqi leaderships.

Although he did not say so in as many words, Mr. Arafat appeared to convey an Iraqi confidence that the Soviet Union — a strong ally until the day of the invasion of Kuwait — would be the first to drop out of the anti-Iraq coalition.

There are voices "in the Soviet Union, Europe and the Third World that the aggression (against Iraq) has exceeded the mandate of the Security Council resolutions," he said. "There is no doubt that the real target for this dirty war and aggression is not for the sake of (ousted Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh) Jaber (Al Ahmad Al Sabah) or liberate Kuwait," he said. "It is to destroy the Iraqi infrastructure and, as Senator (Edward) Kennedy said, it is purely for economic interests."

Mr. Arafat asserted that Israel had turned itself to be the storage for American arsenal in the Middle East in the wake of the detente between Moscow and Washington and that the Jewish state "is already participating" in the war against Iraq. "They are preparing themselves for a certain time to come into the open," he said.

Bombs

(Continued from page 1)

Security Council Resolution 660, including the clause related to an

Iraqi withdrawal."

But it said the actual withdrawal should be linked, among other things, to a pullout of allied forces from the Gulf and an Israeli withdrawal from occupied Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories.

The United States and the allies have adamantly rejected any link between a withdrawal from Kuwait and other Middle East problems.

The RCC statement was the first time since the invasion of Kuwait that Baghdad has outrightly stated it was willing to end its occupation of Kuwait.

The Iranian news agency IRNA said a Baghdad factory that made powdered milk for infants has been hit again by allied bombers.

Reporting from the Iraqi capital, IRNA said the factory sustained heavy damage but there were no casualties because the raid was carried out Friday night.

The agency quoted a factory official as saying 98 per cent of its equipment was now destroyed. The factory was the biggest of its kind in the Middle East, the official said.

Iraq said the raids on the milk factory in the first days of the month-long war were evidence the allies deliberately attacked non-military targets.

The United States contended it was a secret poison gas plant and a legitimate target.

Baghdad allowed Iranian correspondents into Iraq this week for the first time in more than a decade.

IRNA said economic installations in the holy Shi'ite Muslim town of Kadhimiya just north of Baghdad were not damaged by allied bombs except for the A'zamiyah telecommunications centre which was "thoroughly destroyed."

The Revolutionary Command Council, in a decree published in official newspapers Saturday, said that all government employees must report to work or face measures similar to those applied to army deserters. War-time deserters face execution.

The council said however that only workers provided with government transport were obliged to report to work. The sale of fuel to private motorists has been banned.

In the first days of the war allied bombers and missiles knocked out electricity, telephone lines, water supplies and other services in Baghdad, which had a pre-war population of about four million.

Many residents of the city have sought refuge in outlying areas of the country.

The Iraqi military's latest communique, the 51st of the war, said that the allies carried out 95 air raids against civilian targets in the last 24 hours.

The communique, issued Saturday morning, said there were 120 allied sorties against military targets in the southern war zone — a reference to Kuwait and the Basra area.

The government newspaper Al Jumhuriyah said the Iraqi leadership's withdrawal offer was a "historic initiative that reflects Iraq's true wish to lead a secure and stable life."

"It offers the peoples and countries of the region a secure and stable life and will put the wicked alliance to the real test," it added in an editorial.

Its peace offer aside, Iraq remained defiant Saturday, saying it was still looking forward to a land battle it says the allies are scared to fight because of possible heavy losses.

"Our armed forces are pre-

pared for the duel to put a decisive end to the infidels," the army's chief of staff said in remarks published in Al Thawra, newspaper of the ruling Baath Party.

The army is determined to crush the aggressive forces in an unprecedented way," he added. He repeated earlier Iraqi assertions that the allies were avoiding a ground confrontation with the Iraqi army.

The allies say they will not launch a land offensive against Iraq's more than 500,000 troops in and around Kuwait until they are ready and allied casualties are kept to a minimum.

Major-General Tariq Abdulrahman, a hero of Iraq's 1980-88 war against Iran, said the allies were redrawing their war plans as they continue to postpone entering a land battle.

The American enemy depends on the air force and fears the ground battle which makes him recalculate his plans every day."

"The weak morale of the American soldier is being compensated by high technology to balance the great courage of the Iraqi fighter," he was quoted as saying by Baghdad dailies.

Coalition

(Continued from page 1)

maybe in the meeting in Moscow with (Iraqi Foreign Minister) Tariq Aziz Iraq may come with more acceptable proposals."

The United States will press on with the war despite Iraq's offer to leave Kuwait, Turkish President Turgut Ozal said.

"Iraq must withdraw unconditionally. I see the United States as continuing (the war)," Mr. Ozal told officers of Turkey's military staff college in Istanbul.

Israel

(Continued from page 1)

Gulf war began on Jan. 17, involving a total of 35 missiles. Four people have been killed and more than 300 wounded in the attacks.

Some incoming Scuds have been intercepted by U.S. Patriot anti-missile missiles rushed to the Jewish state after the initial Iraqi attacks.

Israel now refuses to say whether Patriots were used during an attack and gives no details of where Scuds land, to avoid helping Iraq pinpoint its targets.

Before dawn Saturday, Iraq launched a Scud at the Saudi port of Jubail, but the missile broke up in flight and landed harmlessly, allied officials said.

An Israeli soldier on leave was seriously injured when a home-made bomb exploded on a settlement in the occupied Gaza Strip, the army command said.

This was the first serious uprising incident in the Gaza Strip since the start of the Gulf war. The uprising began Dec. 1987.

An army spokesman said that the soldier was visiting the Nitzan kibbutz in the occupied Gaza Strip while on leave this weekend.

The soldier opened the door to the kibbutz sprinkler system and set off the bomb, the spokesman added.

Row with U.S.

The White House Friday issued a tough statement castigating Israeli Ambassador Zelman Shoval for "outrageous behaviour" in criticising the United States in an interview.

In the interview with Reuters on Thursday, Mr. Shoval com-

plained that Israel was being given the "run-around" by Washington on its request for aid to absorb Soviet Jewish immigrants.

A White House statement said: "Public statements made yesterday by Israeli Ambassador Zelman Shoval criticising the United States are outrageous and outside the bounds of acceptable behaviour by the ambassador of any friendly country."

The statement, issued in the name of White House spokesman Martin Fitzwater, said: "The secretary of state made this clear to the ambassador yesterday and the president pre-empted (Israeli) Prime Minister Shamir by cable this morning."

Diplomats said the language of the statement was extraordinarily blunt.

Officials said both Mr. Bush and Secretary of State James Baker were furious when they read the interview. Mr. Baker summoned Mr. Shoval to his office to protest within two hours of the interview being published.

The interview brought strains between Israel and the United States, buried during the Gulf war when Israel refrained from retaliating for Iraqi missile attacks, out into the open again.

Anbari

(Continued from page 1)

coalition of parrots."

Pressed to say whether Iraq would negotiate if the Kuwaitis made themselves available, he said: "Let's accept the principle of negotiation. We are interested in negotiating with all parties who are really, right now, conducting the war against Iraq."

He also said a ceasefire would be necessary, adding: "Ask any military soldier and he will tell you that you cannot have really withdrawal without some sort of a ceasefire arrangement."

Earlier, Soviet Ambassador Yuliy M. Vorontsov said he hoped Monday's planned meeting in Moscow between President Mikhail Gorbachev and Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz would enlighten Moscow, the council and the international community about Iraq's intentions.

"We need a lot of clarification of the Iraqi announcement and hope we get a lot of answers," Mr. Vorontsov said.

Iran and the Soviet Union have been consulting each other in their efforts to find a solution to the war.

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati Saturday credited Tehran and Moscow for Iraq's conditional offer to withdraw from Kuwait, the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) reported Saturday.

Mr. Velayati, who returned from Moscow earlier, met with Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Saadoun Hammadi at Tehran's Mehrabad airport to discuss the Iraqi offer.

Hammadi

(Continued from page 1)

convince people in the Middle East that "domination and control of political, economic and social life of the region was not among the objectives they pursue."

He criticised the Security Council for not meeting weeks ago when the war broke out and noted that some members of the council even attempted to prevent informal consultations in the early stages of the conflict.

Commenting on Friday's council meeting from which the public was excluded, Mr. Kharrazi said, the session was "an affront to the democratic process."

The pro-government newspaper Tehran Times said Saturday although the allies' reaction to the Iraqi initiative was negative, "one need not take this too seriously and we can hopefully think of the Persian Gulf war as coming to a close..."

"The West should not now give any chance to Saddam and the Iraqi leadership to back track on this announcement and the West, too, should state their willingness to withdraw forthwith. The ball... is in the West's court."

Tehran Times said Baghdad's "stunning" announcement was not a victory for the 28-member U.S.-led alliance which had failed to oust Iraqi forces from Kuwait after nearly a month of relentless air attacks.

"It seems it was only the callous bombing of cities and villages and killing of innocent people that has hastened the Iraqi initiative for accepting Resolution 660," it said.

Jomhuri Eslami newspaper said although the conditions set out in Baghdad's statement hark back to its headline position, the mention of withdrawal was a new position which should be dealt with delicately.

"It must be employed to stop the killing of Muslims of Iraq," it said.

Moscow

(Continued from page 1)

Moscow saw the Iraqi offer as an opening worthy of serious exploration — in sharp contrast to U.S. President George Bush, who denounced it as a "cruel hoax" and "dead on arrival."

After reading the Foreign Ministry statement, Mr. Churkin told reporters that Soviet officials preferred to look at the positive aspects of the Baghdad announcement and indicated the Kremlin would pursue this approach with Mr. Aziz.

White House spokesman Roman Popadink said that Mr. Bush received a letter from Mr. Gorbachev before Iraq's peace offer, but he declined to give details.

"The president did receive a letter last week from President Gorbachev. The letter did discuss the situation in the Gulf, but I can give no further details," Mr. Popadink said.

Mr. Churkin said Bessmertnykh called U.S. Secretary of State James Baker Friday night to discuss Baghdad's statement.

On Friday Mr. Bessmertnykh said the offer "opens up a new stage in the development of the conflict." According to the state news agency TASS, he said the Soviets expect to get more information about the offer during the talks with Mr. Aziz.

The Soviet Union has been at the forefront of efforts to end the Gulf war in recent days, holding meetings with Iraqi, Iranian and Kuwaiti officials in Moscow.

Vitaly Ignatenko, a spokesman for Mr. Gorbachev, said Friday that Soviet officials were looking forward to the meeting with Mr. Aziz "with impatience."

Mr. Gorbachev met with Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati Friday and the two agreed that the Iraqi statement has "a positive signal," but that it needed to be clarified by Mr. Aziz, TASS reported.

Mr. Velayati left Moscow Saturday TASS said. It said that Mr. Bessmertnykh will travel to Tehran in the near future to continue talks on Iran's efforts to bring an end to the Gulf conflict.

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	weight	38	Sharpen	54	Seashore	61	Odlist
3	Similar	41	Insect stage	55	Cosby's forte	62	Special periods

Western banks move out of Eastern Europe in '90

BASEL, Switzerland (AP) — Western commercial banks have dramatically cut lending to the struggling former Soviet Bloc through most of last year, an official survey has said.

The Bank for International Settlements (BIS) said Western banks reporting to it reduced outstanding claims in Eastern Europe by seven per cent, or \$6.8 billion, in the first nine months of 1990.

That more than reversed their increase in net claims, or outstanding loans, in all of 1989, the survey said.

"The speed and extent of the contraction in banks' outstanding net exposure to central and Eastern European countries in the first nine months of 1990 have been dramatic," it said.

BIS analysts, citing the enormous uncertainties of the economic reform process, appealed to governments and other official institutions to help provide the huge sums needed to foster a transition to market economies.

"Since it is unlikely that adequate amounts of private funds will

be forthcoming until there is firm evidence of the success of the reform process, official aid will have a central role to play," the survey said.

Official funds and guarantees "may help to overcome the worst short-term hardships, act as a catalyst in the longer-term reform process itself, and underpin the flow of private investment capital to these countries."

Banks have grown more cautious because of the industry's hard times as well as problems with massive East European borrowing in the 1980s, BIS said.

Poland was the exception to an otherwise gloomy economic picture.

The amount Eastern Europe owed Western banks declined in all countries except Poland over the period, BIS said.

Poland also boosted its deposits with Western banks \$3.9 billion to an all-time high of \$8.1 billion at the end of September thanks to a trade surplus, the report said.

Overall, the area's deposits with Western banks fell \$3 billion

in the first three quarters of 1990, after a rise of \$3.2 billion in 1989.

The Soviet Union drew an unprecedented \$7.2 billion, while Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Romania also reduced deposits, the report said.

Several countries in the region improved their foreign trade in 1990, but prospects for more progress look dim, BIS said.

Despite the Gulf crisis, Western banks' net international lending recovered by \$292.3 billion in the third quarter of 1990. That followed a decline of \$10.7 billion the preceding quarter.

Most of the increase was due to interbank lending by Japanese banks, BIS said.

Among the effects of the Gulf crisis was that oil producing nations in the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries shifted assets into Britain, Switzerland and the United States, BIS said. The survey gave no further details of the movements.

The Basel-based BIS acts as a clearing house of data among central banks in major industrialised countries.

Gulf war slows down Portugal's privatisation programme

LISBON (AP) — The Gulf war has cast a shadow over Portugal's extensive privatisation programme, the centrepiece of government plans to overhaul one of Europe's poorest economies.

The centre-right administration indefinitely postponed the sale of the state's majority share in the profitable insurer Alianca Seguradora that was scheduled for Jan. 29.

Other privatisation planned for this year, including the Petrol oil company that is Portugal's biggest firm, may be delayed if the Gulf crisis continues to destabilise world share prices.

Government officials have said the process will restart soon, but have declined to set a date for the resumption.

"We have a great political will to continue our programme of privatisations, but everything has its limit," secretary of state for finance, Jose Manuel Elias da Costa, said in a recent interview.

Doubts caused by the looming Gulf crisis were blamed for a sudden pullout of foreign money in November's privatisation of the Central bank.

That flotation left over one-third of shares unsold, the first time such a privatisation was undersubscribed.

The privatisations aim to overturn the massive state takeover of industry and finance by leftist governments following Portugal's 1974 revolution that overthrew 48 years of ultraconservative dictatorship.

Last year, the state shed two brewers, a major bank, a shipping line, an insurance company, a daily newspaper and one-third of its 100 per cent holding in the country's largest commercial bank, Banco Portugues de Atlantico.

The money from sales has been used to put a dent into Portugal's public debt which at the equivalent of \$11 billion stands at some 70 per cent of the nation's gross national product.

Threat of inflation resurfaces U.S. sinks deeper in recession

WASHINGTON (Agencies) — The U.S. economy, mired in recession, faced the threat of a new problem Friday — faster inflation — that could make ending the downturn that much harder.

The government reported Friday that industrial output fell 0.4 per cent in January, squelching hopes for an early end to the recession. Meanwhile, the core rate for the producer price index, which measures price gains at the factory floor, unexpectedly, jumped 0.5 per cent.

That was bad news for the White House, which has refused to boost spending or cut taxes to bail out the economy but instead has called on the inflation-wary Federal Reserve to cut interest rates further.

Overall producer prices fell 0.1 per cent last month. But economists said that reflected declines in food and energy prices. They said the jump in the core rate, which excludes food and energy, would make it difficult for the central bank to act without fears of boosting inflation.

But despite the dreary news, President George Bush continued to sound upbeat about the long-term economic outlook.

"If the past is prologue, our economic future is going to be very, very bright indeed, in spite of today's concerns," Bush told a scientists' association. The White House has predicted that the economy will rebound by mid-year.

The 0.4 per cent fall in industrial output last month occurred across almost all industries except

automobiles, which bounced back after a depressed fourth quarter. The drop followed a steep 1.1 per cent decline in December.

Even a steep fall in the U.S. trade deficit in December — to \$6.25 billion from \$8.91 billion in November — was seen as a sign of a weak economy. The drop stemmed from lower U.S. demand for imports, rather than higher exports.

"We're not through this recession yet," said David Wyss, chief financial economist at the DRU/McGraw Hill think tank, "and inflation hasn't gone away."

The report on industrial production showed a continuing slide with no end in sight, said Allen Sinai, chief economist of the Boston Co. financial firm. "The bottom line is that we have a deep recession that is entrenched."

Analysts were worried not only by the 0.4 per cent drop in January's production level but also by a sharp revision to the December report, showing that output fell by 1.1 per cent that month, almost double the original estimate.

This certainly confirms that the economy is still in a recession," said David Jones, an economist with Andrey G. Lanston and Co. financial firm who forecast that overall economic activity would fall at a faster rate in the January-March quarter than the 2.1 per cent drop in the October-December period.

Private analysts saw at least a glimmer of hope in the reports showing further moderation in

wholesale prices and a significant narrowing of the trade deficit.

The foreign trade gap fell to \$101 billion in 1990, down 7.7 per cent from the preceding year, as weak domestic demand dampened Americans' appetite for imports while U.S. exports were climbing to an all-time high. The trade gap in December narrowed to \$6.25 billion.

The 0.1 per cent decline in wholesale prices, which followed a 0.6 per cent drop in December, reflected a big decline in gasoline prices and lower food costs.

Those two factors offset higher automobile costs and a record 5.9 per cent jump in the wholesale cost of alcoholic beverages, an increase blamed in part on manufacturers taking advantage of new taxes on beer, wine and liquor to hike their own prices.

Lower inflation should give the Federal Reserve more room to fight the downturn with further interest rate cuts while the continued demand for U.S. exports overseas should be a source of strength in 1991, analysts said.

However, they worried that a prolonged Gulf war, by adding to consumer uncertainty, threatened a deeper and longer recession.

Commerce Secretary Robert Mosbacher said the country's strong export performance was "the key to leading us out of the recession" and forecast "major improvement in the last half of the year" in terms of economic output.

Mosbacher said the U.S. deficit would have shrunk even further

to \$91 billion, in 1990 except for the spike in oil costs that occurred after Saddam Hussein's Aug. 2 invasion of Kuwait.

Wyss predicted that the U.S. trade gap would shrink to 78 billion this year.

Private economists also forecast a significant slowdown in the U.S. inflation rates based on a belief that oil prices, after surging to nearly \$40 per barrel after the invasion, will remain closer to \$20 for most of this year.

The good news in Friday's report on wholesale prices was credited to a 10 per cent drop in gasoline costs and a 6.2 per cent decline in home heating oil costs.

The survey for the Labour Department's producer price index was completed before the Jan. 17 start of the allied air war against Iraq. Since that time, world oil prices have dropped even further and analysts said this development will spell more price reductions in coming months.

The 0.1 per cent decline in wholesale prices followed a 0.6 per cent drop in December and translated into an annual rate of decrease of one per cent, far below the 5.6 per cent rise in wholesale prices that occurred in 1990.

Consumer prices rose 6.1 per cent last year. Both wholesale and consumer prices rose at the fastest pace since 1981.

Wyss predicted that wholesale prices will actually fall by about 0.6 per cent in 1991. He forecast a moderate 3.6 per cent increase in consumer prices for this year.

Japan's trade surplus widens for first time in five months

TOKYO (AP) — Japan's trade surplus rose above year-earlier levels for the first time in five months in January, the finance ministry has said, but officials said this was mainly because the January 1990 surplus was so small.

The surplus of \$987 million was more than triple the January 1990 figure of \$319 million, but well below the \$3.39 billion surplus in December, the ministry said.

A ministry official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that overall, Japan's "surplus will continue to stay in a downward trend."

In trade with the United States, its biggest trading partner, Japan showed a \$2.11 billion surplus in January, up 9.9 per cent from

January 1990 to \$20.80 billion. Exports climbed 16.7 per cent to \$21.78 billion.

A sharp growth in Japan's import bill for oil during the Gulf crisis has helped shrink the trade surplus in past months, but that bill grew at a slower rate in January.

The volume of crude oil imports fell by 1.8 per cent from January 1990, possibly because imports had been climbing sharply in previous months to build up inventories, the official said.

Oil imports rose 51.6 per cent from a year earlier in value terms, however, to \$3.41 billion. The price of a barrel of oil declined to \$28.60 in January from \$32.77 in December, but was still sharply higher than \$18.53 in January

1990.

Japan's exports to the United States in January rose 7.2 per cent to \$6.65 billion, while imports from the United States climbed 5.7 per cent to \$4.25 billion. The exports included motor vehicles worth \$2.03 billion, up 15.9 per cent, and electric equipment worth 1.37 billion, up 8.1 per cent.

In trade with the European Community, Japan's surplus rose to \$1.63 billion from \$873.3 million in January 1990. Exports grew 19.0 per cent to \$4.49 billion, but imports fell 1.1 per cent to \$2.87 billion.

The figures were on a customs clearance basis, with freight and insurance charges included in imports but not exports.

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U.S. airlines sharpen competition

NEW YORK (AP) — Airlines are scrambling to offer another round of cheap fares, after Pan American World Airways (Pan Am) started a new sale and some competitors quickly jumped in to match it.

The deals on domestic and foreign travel can save travellers more than 50 per cent in many cases. But some airlines were not immediately getting into the fray this time.

"These are not going to be fares based on any possibility of a

profit," said Neil Monre, a spokesman for Delta Air Lines, which made no immediate decision on matching the Pan Am promotion announced Thursday.

Pan Am, which is operating under chapter 11 protection in U.S. bankruptcy court, said it was trying to stimulate business. Airlines have been hit hard by high fuel prices, the recession, and a drop in booking that came as passengers began fearing guerrilla attacks.

"The current U.S. economic

environment continues to be weak and has had a softening effect on demand for air travel," said John Bloodworth, Pan Am's vice president for advertising and marketing programmes. "We believe that our attractive low fares will provide potential customers with an additional incentive now to travel."

Pan Am said its cheap tickets would apply to most cities it serves in the continental United States and to many overseas destinations, including western Europe. The tickets cost as little as \$119 each way for passengers who fly a regular flight that cost at least \$250 by March 1. Passengers who did not take an earlier flight would have to pay as little as \$139 each way.

For an extra \$100, people can fly to Hawaii, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Brazil, Pan Am said.

There are several other sur-

charges that can be applied, depending on when and where people travel.

Pan Am was careful to point out that its promotion met guidelines that had previously been approved by U.S. and British aviation officials. A squabble between the transportation authorities of both nations killed a series of fare sales on United States-United Kingdom flights that had been offered this week by airlines on both sides of the Atlantic.

Pan Am spokeswoman Elizabeth Hinko said it was difficult to say how much passengers could save under the new promotion.

The fares from New York to London would be less than half of regular discount fares of \$718 per round trip, but not much less than some of the sale prices that were stopped by the U.S. transportation department effective Friday.

Oversupply, weak demand characterise world beef market

GENEVA (AP) — Worldwide beef production is expected to exceed demand once again in 1991, according to a report by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

The report by the GATT secretariat said the fall in demand for beef in 1990 was largely due to the general economic slowdown and abundant supplies of cheaper poultry meat.

It said that west Europe had also been affected by the closure of important Iraqi and Kuwaiti markets, and by consumer fears about possible risks to health posed by "bovine spongiform encephalopathy," or "mad-cow disease."

The report said the two factors contributed to a fall of 281,000 tonnes of beef exports from the European Community (EC).

Iraq and Kuwait imported 100,000 tonnes of EC beef in 1989 before the imposition of international sanctions against Iraq for its invasion of Kuwait.

Brazil, another big producer, suffered a 30 per cent drop in exports as a result of market uncertainties arising from the country's radical economic reform programmes and U.S. hygiene restriction on canned meat.

Overall, estimated world beef exports amounted to 3.9 million tonnes last year, 120,000 tonnes lower than 1989, the report said.

Output in major beef producing countries covered by the report rose by one per cent to 31.1 million tonnes, largely due to expansion in the 12-nation EC and Australia.

By contrast, production in the United States fell by 1.1 per cent, in Canada by 2.6 per cent, in New Zealand by 1.1 per cent and in Argentina by 2.1 per cent, it said.

For 1991, the report predicted that prices would remain weak because of excess production.

It said EC beef exports could rise by one third of a record nine million tonnes.

The report focuses on 27 countries that are members of the arrangement regarding bovine meat. Together they account for 90 per cent of beef and veal exports and more than 60 per cent of world consumption and production.

Sabena details restructuring programme and 1990 losses

BRUSSELS (AP) — Sabena, the loss-making national airline, has unveiled a state-backed restructuring programme which included deep job cuts and a cooperation agreement with British Airways.

Company Chairman Pierre Godfroid told a news conference Sabena SA posted a consolidated operating loss of 6.56 billion francs (\$219.8 million) in 1990, but that this would narrow to 4.25 billion francs (\$142.4 million) this year.

He also said Sabena had reached a working agreement with British Airways PLC (B.A.), Britain's privatised flag carrier.

"We decided on the commercial and industrial level to work together," Godfroid said.

He gave no further details, but added B.A. had asked Sabena, which is 53 per cent state-owned, to delay the start of cooperation as it was also restructuring.

He said other partners for Sabena were possible in the future and mentioned American Airlines as a potential candidate.

Sabena said in a statement that 2,200 jobs would be cut from its 11,800-strong workforce.

plan was to return the company to a 600 million franc (\$20 million) operating profit by 1992, boost authorised capital to 30 billion francs (\$1 billion) and conclude an alliance with another airline.

The deal with B.A. will allow Sabena to establish a European "hub" in Brussels. A planned joint venture with the Netherlands KLM Royal Dutch Airlines and B.A. fell through last year.

Like other European airlines, Sabena has been hit hard by the Gulf crisis. Passenger numbers have dropped, while fuel and insurance costs have risen sharply.

Sabena said the hoped-for operating profit of 600 million francs (\$20 million) by 1992 was based on calculations made before the Gulf war broke out. It said the airline's profit recovery would be delayed if the war lasted a long time.

The statement said the government would cover investors bringing new funds to Sabena against the risk of bankruptcy.

But it made no reference to a report on Belgian radio saying the state had agreed to foot the

entire plan.

Sabena said it would issue preferred stock to the value of eight billion francs (\$268 million) to Belgian investors. It was seeking six billion francs (\$201 million) in capital from the airline with which it forges an alliance.

Sabena said a company-guaranteed eight per cent dividend would be paid for four years to holders of new preferred stock.

Following the recapitalisation, Sabena said it hoped to float stock on the Brussels bourse in 1994. But it did not make clear what proportion of its stock would be privatised.

Godfroid said the restructuring plan involved large savings in Sabena's activities. He said the airline would cancel or reduce flights to North America and South East Asia, giving savings of 2.25 billion francs (\$75 million) a year.

A programme to improve productivity should save the airline 3.35 billion francs (\$112 million). Sabena would also try to optimise income from its flights, saving another one billion francs (\$33.5 million).

Governor says Germany's new eastern states need \$22 billion

BONN (AP) — Germany's new eastern states need an additional 32 billion marks (\$22 billion) this year to pull out of their financial morass, a state governor has said.

The request for even more financial aid came just a day after Economics Minister Juergen Moellmann outlined proposals to help the five new states.

Moellmann said his plans required at least 10 billion marks (\$6.8 billion) in new spending this year. He called for subsidy cuts and said higher taxes were likely.

In another sign the government fears financial collapse in the new states, the finance ministry is rushing five billion marks (\$3.4 billion) from Germany's unification fund to the east ahead of schedule.

"The situation is not improving as fast as we all thought six or eight months ago," Peter Fietisch, a leading German economist at Frankfurt's Commerzbank, said in an interview. "We really have to admit that it is much more

difficult than we had all assumed to improve the situation, and it'll take longer until we see some recovery."

Moellmann acknowledged that Bonn had underestimated the problems in turning around 45 years of communist central planning.

But the opposition Social Democrats have long accused Kohl's coalition of candy-coating the financial realities of unification in return for voter support.

Friedemann Tetsch, an economic specialist for the Social Democrats, said that at least Moellmann's "point of view is more realistic than before."

"But there are many points in this plan where the government must act," he added. "The problem is that Moellmann did not say exactly what would be done and how much money he needs for the help."

Tetsch said much more than 10 billion in new spending this year was needed.

In an interview with the private radio station Antenne Bayern, the Brandenburg governor, Manfred Stolpe, said the eastern states needed at least 32 billion marks this year.

Stolpe, a Social Democrat, said 10 to 12 billion marks (\$6.8 to \$8.2 billion) were needed to keep city and community administrations running, in addition to 20 billion (\$13.7 billion) in investments.

Government spokesman Dieter Vogel said there would have to be "absolute clarity" on the states' various needs before Stolpe's request could be considered.

Kohl's spokesman also said the former West German states had to do more to help the east. He called their recent offer of 15 billion marks (\$10 billion) insufficient.

"The time for things coming out in dribs and drabs should be coming to an end," Vogel said.

Industry and infrastructure in the five new states are crumbling, in addition to soaring unemployment in nearly a third of the workforce. Several cities, including the birthplace of East Germany's revolution, Leipzig, have said they're on the verge of bankruptcy.

Many German newspapers were highly critical last week of Moellmann's proposals, saying they contained no new ideas on economic recovery.

Fietisch said the most important suggestion was a 10 per cent cut in subsidies. But he noted politicians have been trying to do that for the last decade. Increased public spending could lead to rising interest rates which would, in turn, discourage investment in the east, he said in arguing for subsidy cuts to generate new money.

Union demands for higher wages for eastern workers could also undermine investment because one of the east's strong points is a cheaper labour market, Fietisch said.

However, too-low wages could prod even more skilled workers to flee west.

Fietisch predicted a slight economic upturn in the second half of 1991, but he also said: "This year is six weeks old. None of us knows what will happen."

AMMAN EXCHANGE RATES					
Saturday, February 16, 1991					
Central Bank official rates					
	Buy	Sell		Buy	Sell
U.S. dollar	664.0	668.0	Japanese yen (for 100)	508.9	512.0
Pound Sterling	1306.3	1314.1	Dutch guilder	398.7	401.1
Deutschmark	449.1	451.8	Swedish crown	120.3	121.0
Swiss franc	523.0	526.1	Italian lira (for 100)	39.8	40.2
French franc	131.9	132.7	Belgian franc (for 10)	218.5	219.8

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Moscow radical leader under pressure to quit

MOSCOW (R) — A Moscow city leader whose district has become an oasis of capitalism is under pressure to resign, spurring fears of a campaign to purge reformers from office.

Ilya Zaslavsky, chairman of southwest Moscow's October district, narrowly escaped being ousted this week amid charges he moved too far and too fast toward a market economy.

"It is our district which is a symbol of political liberty for the country," said 29-year-old Zaslavsky, swept into power last March in a wave of anti-communism.

"I will try to hold on, but it's question of time before all the democrats are forced out."

"It is easy to say you are a democrat until the soldiers start patrolling the streets," he said, referring to President Mikhail Gorbachev's decree two weeks ago for police and army units to help keep order in major cities.

Zaslavsky — an invalid, both rarely seen in the corridors of power — is a leader of Democratic Russia, the grassroots movement which propelled reformers into Moscow city posts last March. He rose to prominence in

1989 with election to the Congress of People's Deputies, the Soviet parliament.

In the past year, reformers have inspired thousands of people to march in anti-government street demonstrations and started dismantling Communist Party privileges.

They have also denounced Gorbachev for the military crackdown in the Baltic republics of Lithuania and Latvia in which 21 people died.

Zaslavsky survived a council vote of confidence Thursday by six votes but another ballot is expected Tuesday.

The threat to Zaslavsky comes amid fears that Gorbachev is attempting to drive reformers from public office.

The progressive newspaper Moskovsky Komsomolets headlined: "Today Zaslavsky, who is next?"

Gorbachev said a law on the status of Moscow and Leningrad, expected to limit the power of reform-minded city leaders, will be published by the end of this month.

"Zaslavsky will be kicked out with the entire team — with

(Gavril) Popov, the Moscow mayor, (Anatoly) Sobchak, the mayor of Leningrad — and the others," said Herman Krivichsky, one of his advisers.

Zaslavsky introduced economic reform to October district, prompting many to regard him as a symbol of hope for the Soviet Union. Private enterprises flourish, food supplies are better, tenants can own their houses, and the district is forming its own television cable network.

Success appears to have spurred the move against Zaslavsky. "When the market economy was an abstract idea, everyone was for it," said district executive chairman Georgy Vasiliev.

"But when things got underway people asked themselves: 'Why is my neighbour, the owner of a shop, going to become a millionaire while I continue to be poor?'"

"The only obstacle to a transfer to a market economy is that we are not ready psychologically."

"But psychological change can take place only over 20 years. Take 1985 (when Gorbachev came to power) and add 20 years and you'll see real changes in the Soviet Union."

123 die in Thailand truck blast

PHANG-NGA, Thailand (R) — A truck carrying explosives overturned then blew up in a village in southern Thailand, killing 123 people, police said Saturday.

The blast was probably set off by looters with lighted cigarettes rummaging through the truck, police and witnesses said.

The massive explosion Friday afternoon, and the inferno that followed, also injured more than 100 people and razed dozens of buildings, including a school, a clinic and a Buddhist temple, police said.

Radio Thailand said only about 70 of those killed in the explosion, near the holiday island of Phuket, could be quickly identified.

Anguished villagers searching for missing relatives checked more than 50 mutilated bodies laid out in white sheets along a stretch of highway, but most of the remains were unrecognisable.

"My son was not at home at the time of the explosion. I've no way of identifying him among these burned bodies," Mien Fatha, a 52-year-old rubber plantation worker, said Saturday morning as she sat weeping in a tent at a crash site.

Rescue workers who searched through the night for bodies said severed limbs were found up to 500 metres away.

"It's hard to identify which belonged to whom," a police officer said.

The 10-wheel tractor-trailer, escorted by a police car, overturned on a sharp bend in Phang-Nga province, 850 kilometres south of Bangkok.

Police said officers tried to cordon off the area but a crowd gathered, many from a nearby market, and pushed their way through.

Traffic backed up and about an hour later the road erupted.

Police said the dead included five police officers.

"It looks like the explosion was caused by people trying to search the cargo on the truck," Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan told reporters at Bangkok Airport before flying to the disaster scene Saturday.

A nurse at a nearby hospital said injured survivors had reported that people were smoking cigarettes as they sifted through the cargo.

Early reports said the truck was carrying dynamite but Chatichai, after spending about two hours at the scene, said it was loaded with blasting detonators.

Its owners, the Fakhongphol Company, declined comment.

Hospital sources said 109 injured people were taken to five hospitals. Initial reports indicated there were no foreigners among them.

Many of the dead were in a bus stuck in the traffic, the nurse said. It was packed with lunar new year holidaymakers.

Forty motorcycles and at least nine cars were also wrecked.

The heavy chassis of the trailer was hurled up into the air and landed on a health clinic about 150 metres away.

Buildings up to seven kilometres away were damaged.

E. Europeans seek more security ties than NATO willing to give

BRUSSELS, Belgium (AP) — Despite the near-demise of the Warsaw Pact, NATO insists it's not ready to bring its former adversaries under its security umbrella.

Even so, the Soviet Union's one-time allies are increasingly looking to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) for support. Some have gone so far as to raise the remote possibility of signing on as members.

"NATO is... the only functioning security and military organisation for this continent," said an East European diplomat on condition of anonymity.

But NATO, worried about isolating Moscow militarily, is reluctant to draw in the new democracies and extend its security blanket to the Soviet border.

"We ought to reach out to these countries to make sure that they understand and the Soviet Union... understands we are not indifferent to their security," said William H. Taft IV, the U.S. ambassador to NATO.

The allies have offered financial and political support to the emerging democracies, he noted.

But, he said in an interview, "that is about as much as we can do without redividing Europe (and) isolating the Soviet Union, which would be a very serious mistake."

The issue of how to respond to the breakup of the Warsaw Pact has been troublesome. The United States has pushed for closer contacts with its members, while France has been reluctant to enlarge NATO's turf.

At a July summit, leaders of the 16 alliance nations invited the Soviets and East Europeans to open diplomatic liaisons with the military organisation. In December, NATO foreign ministers promised to "deepen our dialogue on security matters."

But some countries are searching for more to fill the security gap created when they turned their backs on communism and the Warsaw Pact, which was set up by Moscow in 1955. Under pressure from the East Europeans, Moscow has agreed to scrap the pact's military structure by April. Its remaining members are the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Romania.

Czechoslovak President Vaclav Havel said recently the Gulf war and the Soviet crackdown in the Baltic states have demonstrated reasons for closer cooperation with NATO.

NATO political officials, holding unusual talks recently in Prague, were told of Czechoslovak ideas for closer ties, including membership as a final goal.

Havel had been a strong advocate of the 34-nation Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) as a future security structure. Diplomats said, however, the CSCE's limitations were underscored when Moscow blocked a special meeting to discuss its violent repression in Latvia and Lithuania.

Havel will pay a formal visit to NATO in March, the first East European head of state to do so. Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev received an invitation last summer but has not yet set a date.

On a recent visit, Romanian Foreign Minister Adrian Nastase said his country wanted to be an associate member. "To seek such a procedural arrangement would be completely natural," he said.

The East European diplomat in Brussels explained the countries would like "some sort of indirect (security) guarantee" so that Moscow would not feel threatened. But, he said, there hasn't been any response from NATO.

If NATO were to grant membership, the allies would have to

extend their security umbrella. Under NATO's 1949 treaty, members agree to consider an armed attack on any one of them as an attack on all.

Some diplomats said it might be difficult for the new democracies, economically and politically weak in comparison with NATO's members, to take on the responsibilities of membership.

They also noted the countries long have feuded among themselves. Once in the alliance, the others could be burdened with their conflicts. Work on NATO projects, including arms control, has been slowed by tensions between members of Greece and Turkey, which are at odds over the 1974 Turkish invasion of Cyprus.

NATO does not offer an associate member status providing something short of an absolute security guarantee. It could, however, issue a statement of support and apply political pressure if any country attacked a friend.

Hans Binnendijk, director of studies at London's International Institute for Strategic Studies, said that without NATO membership the East Europeans "will try to fall in the shadow of NATO" by joining other Western groups.

"It's not NATO but it's as close as they're going to get in the next couple of years," he said.

The North Atlantic Assembly, NATO's legislative arm, has given most of the nation's parliament the status of associate delegations for key meetings.

The European Community, the 12-nation trading bloc, has agreed to negotiate association, accords just short of membership.

And, the Council of Europe, a human rights group, has granted membership to Hungary and will do the same for Czechoslovakia and Poland.

overloaded and struck a submerged object in a shallow part of the river.

The Amelia II has a recommended capacity of 70 passengers and 45 tons of cargo, the reports said.

The civil defence officials said they were investigating the cause of the sinking.

In a separate development, the death toll kept rising Friday in Peru's cholera epidemic, and worried South American nations applied emergency measures to stop the disease from spreading across their borders.

Health Ministry figures released Friday put the epidemic's official death tally at 90, four higher than a day earlier, with 1,100 new cases. Peru has had 13,768 official cases of cholera since last January.

Radio, television and newspaper reports, however, estimate the epidemic is claiming 10 lives per day.

The cholera outbreak is the first in the Western Hemisphere since early this century. U.S. epidemiologists in Peru were investigating its cause, but government authorities say no conclusions have been reached.

Press reports said at least 80 people were aboard the 60-foot (18-metre) boat, which was headed for the Amazonian city of Iquitos.

The reports said the boat was

Peru gets new premier in reshuffle

LIMA (AP) — In his latest cabinet shakeup, President Alberto Fujimori has named one man to be both Peru's new prime minister and its foreign minister.

Carlos Torres Y Torres Lara, formerly country's labour minister, received the assignment one day after Juan Hurtado Miller resigned from both his positions as Peru's foreign minister and economic minister.

A presidential spokesman said Friday it was not clear if the present Foreign Minister Raul Sanchez Salomayor was resigned or if he will assume another post in the government. The spokesman also did not know who would replace Torres as labour minister.

Hurtado is the main author of economic austerity plan imposed in August and his resignation marks the most important governmental change since Fujimori took power on July 28.

The president had already named economist Carlos Bolana to replace Hurtado as the country's economic minister. Bolana is regarded as an orthodox economist who is unlikely to make big changes in Peru's austerity programme.

Office, blamed army troops for the El Zapote slayings. The government rejected the accusation, but acknowledged that, according to its own investigation implicated at least one soldier and two ex-soldiers.

Before dawn on Feb. 9, intruders splashed gasoline throughout the editorial offices and printing plant of El Diario Latino, then set the newspaper ablaze. The paper, the most pluralist and oldest of Salvadoran dailies, was the only one to include regularly the leftist rebel point of view.

Its reporters travelled to guerrilla-controlled zones and published interviews with insurgent commanders that incensed elements of the radical right. The paper's director Francisco Valencia, recalling bombings that destroyed two left-leaning papers in the early 1980s, blamed the military and the rightist government of President Alfredo Cristiani for the arson attack.

The government rejected the accusation.

Felix Ulloa, a legislative candidate of the Democratic Convergence, a social-democratic electoral alliance, said in an interview: "The cosmetic makeover they had tried to present — that this was a democratic government and that this civilian president was not going to continue with death squad policies of belligerence and extermination — that mask is falling off. Because things like what happened to Diario Latino, the massacre of El Zapote, serve to belie that image of democracy, and the world begins to see the country as it really is and what is represented by those

agenda that included purging and reforming the armed forces and overhauling the judiciary, the constitution and the electoral system. Five rounds of talks held under the scrutiny of press and public produced little progress.

But the process has been secret and intense since October. And diplomatic, government and guerrilla sources say a breakthrough may be near.

The sources, who insisted on anonymity, say U.N. mediator Alvaro Desouto has drafted a ceasefire document that meets with the approval of the rebels, who so far have insisted the war would not halt until substantial accords on the agenda items were achieved.

According to the sources, the remaining stumbling block to an imminent ceasefire is the government's rejection of the demand to designate certain swaths of territory as guerrilla-controlled.

The FMLN controls or predominates in almost a quarter of Salvadoran territory in which its forces move freely, maintain bases and fulfill government-type functions such as administration of education and health care. But public and formal acknowledgement of such duality of power is anathema to the government.

Diplomats say upcoming negotiating sessions will likely focus on working out terminology regarding guerrilla zones that does minimum harm to official pride.

In the meantime, military and rebel sources say fighting is likely to increase in coming weeks as both sides try to cement positions for the moment when formal lines are drawn.

U.N.-mediated peace talks began nine months ago with an

Commonwealth ministers review S. African reforms

LONDON (R) — Nine Commonwealth foreign ministers met in London Saturday to review political change in South Africa, but they appeared unlikely to recommend an early end to sanctions.

The committee was set up in 1987 to monitor events in South Africa and review sporting and other sanctions against it. It is now considering President F. W. de Klerk's recent proposals to end key apartheid laws.

The chairman of the Commonwealth Committee of Foreign Ministers on South Africa, Joe Clark of Canada, said decisions did not have to be made until a Commonwealth summit in Zimbabwe in October.

"We are going to try to get some first hand reports on the reaction to some of the most recent changes proposed by the government of South Africa," he said.

Clark spoke to reporters as the one-day meeting of ministers of Australia, Canada, Guyana, India, Malaysia, Nigeria, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe began.

"We want to be sure we know what... the implications are," he said. "We may begin then consideration of a position that might be sensible for the Commonwealth to recommend."

But he added: "Our purpose today was to inform ourselves of developments rather than to set out to ease sanctions at this particular meeting."

"We want to be in a position to make recommendations to the heads of government meeting in Harare in the fall. We need not

do that here. We could do that at another meeting some time between now and the Harare meeting."

Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans was asked if the talks would review the Commonwealth's 1977 Gleneagles Accord banning sporting links with South Africa.

"I am sure we will be discussing that, but it is important to say that we are not going to review the Gleneagles Accord."

British Prime Minister John Major, whose country is not a member of the committee, has urged that sporting links with South Africa be revived.

The European Community wants to lift a ban on imports of iron, steel and gold coins once the South African parliament repeals apartheid laws classifying people by race and segregating housing and land.

But the 50-member Commonwealth, which groups former British colonies and territories, has hitherto argued for sanctions to be maintained until South Africa, where blacks do not have the vote, totally dismantles apartheid.

It decided at a summit in Malaysia in 1989 to maintain extensive sanctions and develop new forms of financial pressure on Pretoria and to seek ways to strengthen a U.N. arms embargo.

Saturday's meeting was hearing a report by Thabo Mbeki, chief foreign affairs spokesman of the African National Congress. He was briefing ministers on recent talks between ANC Deputy President Nelson Mandela and De Klerk.

ANC aide killed by bomb

JOHANNESBURG (R) — A senior African National Congress (ANC) official was killed Saturday when a device hidden in a tape recorder sent to him from abroad exploded, police said.

They said the tape recorder was sent to Bheki Mlangeni, a senior member of the ANC's Legal Department, from either Lusaka or Switzerland.

"He apparently put in a cassette. When he pressed the play button, the device exploded. He was fatally wounded," police spokesman Ruben Bloomberg said.

Human rights groups say more than 70 opponents of apartheid within South Africa and abroad have been assassinated over the past 10 years by government agents.

Police have failed to solve almost all the cases, many involving killings of members of Nelson Mandela's ANC, the main anti-apartheid movement.

ANC spokesman Saki Maccozoma said Mlangeni, a lawyer, investigated the killing of anti-apartheid activists by govern-

ments supporting death squads in South Africa and abroad.

An accord thrashed out by De Klerk and African National Congress (ANC) leader Nelson Mandela could revive faltering progress towards democracy from white minority rule in South Africa.

Political analysts in Cape Town said the agreement forged Tuesday and revealed Friday appeared to leave large areas of uncertainty about the obligations of the two sides in the prelude to formal negotiations on a democratic constitution.

A senior government source said there were still grey areas either side could exploit if the spirit were not right.

The ANC agreed to curb the activities of its armed wing, Umkhonto We Sizwe (Spear of the Nation) and the government promised to reign in security forces and accelerate the release of political prisoners.

Several clauses referred to the need for peaceful political activity.

Ershad's trial postponed

DHAKA (AP) — The trial of ousted President Hussain Muhammad Ershad was postponed Saturday after he claimed to be ill and failed to appear before a special tribunal.

The former army general, who resigned as president in December following massive street protests, was supposed to answer charges of illegal possession of firearms.

The delay may enhance Ershad's chances of running for parliament in the Feb. 27 election. Under Bangladeshi law, convicts are barred from seeking

elective office but people with charges pending are free to run for election.

Ershad is seeking election to parliament in his home district of Rangpur, where his chance of victory is considered good. But the majority of parliament's 300 seats are expected to be divided among the parties that forced Ershad out of office last winter.

"Ershad is trying to avoid the case," Attorney General Anwar Hossain told a reporter after the ex-president failed to show up in court.

Hardliners plan to dump Gorbachev, install dictatorship

MOSCOW (AP) — Hardliners say they're planning to dump Soviet President Mikhail S. Gorbachev and install a dictatorship to deal with the country's mounting economic crisis.

Vladimir Voronin, leader of the self-styled National Salvation Committee, said in a recent interview that he would eliminate parliament, political parties, the free press and the presidency if his group takes power.

And army Col. Viktor Alkhis, a leader of hardline Soyuz Group of national parliamentarians, wants Gorbachev to declare martial law or quit.

Hardline views like these are finding support among some Soviets because of economic hardships. Top government officials have met with the National Salvation Committee in an indication that hardliners are a force they cannot ignore.

However, it is far from certain that the majority of the Soviet people would back harsh dictatorial measures even in the hopes it would lead to a better life.

A national poll conducted by the Soviet Centre for Public Opinion in January found 22 per cent agreed that "harsh dictatorship is the only solution to the current situation," while 61 per cent disagreed. The centre's Alexander Telshtik said the survey covered 2,016 people in 47 cities and rural areas and had a 3 per cent margin of error.

Still, the hardliners claim great influence. Alkhis says his Soyuz or "union" group with 500 members is one of 22 political factions backing the National Salvation Committee.

Voronin expects mounting demands for orderly government will prompt Gorbachev or parliament to pass a law or decree transferring power to the National Salvation Committee.

In fact, he has called all political groups to Moscow Saturday to discuss how they would peacefully take over Kremlin power.

"It will not be a coup," Voronin insisted. "It will be perfectly legal."

He predicted Gorbachev will say, "take power, please... I can't lead any more."

At that point, "neither Gorbachev nor the parliament would have power," Voronin said. "It would be his last decree."

Voronin laughed off accusations by reformers that his vision of the Soviet future was a collective dictatorship.

"Do I look like a dictator?" he asked.

Alkhis initially opposed the Salvation Committee, saying he thought it was planning an unconstitutional seizure of power. But he told Moscow News this week that he supports such a committee if it is given power by the parliament.

Once Gorbachev has agreed to transfer power, all political groups and parties would meet to select the 50-member committee. Obtaining a consensus, he said, would be easy.

"If they don't agree with us, they will not become members of the committee," he said.

Hardliners like Voronin and Alkhis, who claim to represent order, appear to be gaining strength as the Soviet Union faces the threat of an economic crash and political break-up.

COLUMN

Ancient city uncovered in Egypt

ASSUT, Egypt (AP) — Workers laying new water pipes have uncovered an ancient city with buildings dating back to Roman, Coptic Christian and Islamic periods. Assut's governor said Hassan Al Afly said the 50 fedan (50 acre) area was immediately put under police guard until the government's antiquities organisation sends experts to check the site. Afly said that five Coptic Christian churches, a number of monasteries and some buildings were discovered around seven metres under the ground, many in poor condition. Writing in Coptic and Roman was found on the walls of the buildings. He said hundreds of gold and bronze coins were also found. Assut is 380 kilometres south of Cairo. The ancient city was discovered at its outskirts. Egypt passed under Roman rule in 30 BC, becoming a province of its Mediterranean empire. Christianity was introduced by the Romans and the Coptic Christian Church was founded. Islam spread to Egypt in the seventh century AD.

Defendant told to expose himself to jury

ATHENS, Georgia (AP) — The defendant in a child molestation case exposed himself in front of jurors — on orders from the judge. Lamar Manus, 41, is charged with molesting a 15-year-old boy. During the trial, the youth testified that the man who molested him had a sex organ like his own. The boy is circumcised, while Manus is not. Defence lawyer David Montgomery asked his client Thursday to expose himself to the jury of nine men and three women, saying the comparison was critical to the case. Montgomery suggested that one juror could be selected to make the observation and tell the other jurors, but Superior Court Judge James Barrow said jurors had to see evidence for themselves. "Do I have to do this for all of them?" Manus asked before complying.

Lesbian vampire trial ends with life sentence

BRISBANE (R) — A 25-year-old Australian woman was sentenced to life imprisonment after a three-week trial which uncovered a bizarre tale of murder, lesbian love and a vampire with mind-control powers. Lisa Ptaschinski was given a life term for the murder of city council worker Edward Ballock, stabbed to death in a frenzied attack on the bank of a river in a Brisbane suburb in October 1989. The woman who carried out the attack, Ptaschinski's lover Tracy Wigginton, had earlier pleaded guilty to the murder and been given a life sentence. Police prosecutor Adrian Gundelach told the court that Wigginton, a beefy 25-year-old factory worker, could not eat solid food and craved human blood. He said Ptaschinski told police Wigginton used to put a tourniquet around her lover's wrist, pump up her vein and make a small cut. "As blood was coming out, Wigginton would suck it with her mouth," Gundelach said. "If you are going out with someone you do whatever you can to please them." Ptaschinski told a psychiatrist who gave evidence at the trial. The lovers and two other accused, Kim Jarvis and Tracey Weng, discussed murdering someone so that Wigginton could feed on blood. Weng said Wigginton could not satisfy her hunger feeding on Ptaschinski, who had a weak heart, and used mind control to persuade them into the killing.

Italian learns wife is not woman

BANGKOK (AP) — An Italian businessman has asked a court to annul his eight-month-old marriage to a Thai after learning his wife had had a sex change operation and was not a "genuine female." Paolo Adoado Boeris, 27, petitioned the Bangkok civil court Wednesday to annul his marriage to Riem Kuenjan, 26, of Phrae province in northern Thailand, according to court records. Boeris, who did not give his hometown in the petition, said he came to Thailand last May as a tourist, and met and fell in love with Riem. They were married in Bangkok last June 4. "The Italian later learned the truth that his wife was not of genuine female sex, but a man had undergone a sex change into a woman," the petition says. The petition said Riem had admitted having the operation.